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THE CHECKERED ROMANCE OF TWO GENERATIONS

— or —
BY EARTHQUAKE AND FIRE

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THE CHECKERED ROMANCE
of TWO GENERATIONS

BRUNT'S, SAN FRANCISCO
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The four great essentials of entertaining fiction, viz.: human interest, unity, action and climax, mark the pages of this book. There are no tedious stretches, descriptions having been reduced to the most condensed form compatible with lucidity and finish, and in order to a clear understanding, sympathetic appreciation and intelligent appraisement of its characters and happenings, every word of the story should be attentively read. This favor the author craves of the reader.

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THE CHECKERED ROMANCE of TWO GENERATIONS

PART ONE

CHAPTER I.

AN EXTRAORDINARY FRIENDSHIP AND ITS BEGINNINGS— HOMEWARD BOUND.

“‘One ought to be able to keep one’s friends, like one’s wine, any number of years in the cellar, only to find it a little crusted at last but better in flavor than ever.’”

Among the crowd of people thronging the station platform at Poughkeepsie, New York, one late June day in the year eighteen-seventy-eight, (the twenty-third of the month, to be *very* definite) the central group was made up of ten or a dozen laughing, chattering girls, with such healthy, happy, intelligent faces and lady-like manners, as to reflect naught but credit upon the *alma mater* whose senior class pin each of them wore.

As the last warning note of the conductor’s “A-l-l a-b-o-a-r-d” died away, two of the number hastily tore themselves from the reluctant leavetakings of the rest, and joining the station porter who stood awaiting

them, satchels in hand, at a respectful distance, stepped aboard the train and followed him into the particular Pullman in which a drawing-room had been reserved for them. While the taller of the girls took from her purse and handed over the customary tip, the other raised curtain and window; and as they slowly steamed away, two dainty bits of lace waved a last good-bye to the bevy of sweet girl graduates left behind.

Following their example, let us also, bid these adieu; wishing them with all our hearts, *bon voyage* over life's tempestuous sea, and turn our attention to becoming acquainted with our two fellow travellers; from one of whom, at least, we shall not again part, until we must needs bid her a final farewell; until the Great Reaper shall have thrust in His sickle and gathered her unto His eternal harvest.

Freshmen at Vassar four years before our story opens, they had registered as Margaret L. Armstrong, Denver, Colorado, and Gertrude C. Warfield, Omaha, Nebraska. Western girls, we see, both of them; and though we had not been told we should have strongly suspected it, for in the bearing of each—although in somewhat varying degree—was seen that blending of frank, fearless independence with feminine modesty, that lends such a charm and that we of the East seldom fail to recognize and admire in every *well born* daughter of the West.

Nearly of an age, but a few months out of their teens, and becomingly dressed in the prevailing mode

in rich though quiet costumes, they would have attracted more than a passing glance anywhere, for unusually handsome girls both were, though of the most pronounced contrast in type.

Descended upon her mother's side from high bred colonial dames, in Margaret Armstrong's veins there ran also a strain of Irish blood, whose purity was at least partially responsible, no doubt, for her very dignified, almost proud carriage, the richness of her complexion, her full, clear, dark blue eyes, shaded by long and heavy silken lashes so dark as to make one in doubt, oftentimes, as to whether the eyes which they veiled were not after all black rather than blue, features good and sufficiently delicate, the mouth alone being a trifle large for perfect symmetry, perhaps, but with rosy lips parting in such a winning smile and revealing a set of such perfect teeth, that one felt as though Nature would have made a grave mistake had she concealed any more of them from view. An abundance of glossy, dark brown hair, rippling in loose waves about a broad, intellectual forehead, completed a picture good indeed to look upon; and being somewhat taller than the average, well developed and beautiful of form, the girl's appearance was certainly such as our French cousins designate, *distingue*.

Her companion—of medium height and slight though pleasingly rounded figure—was the very embodiment of grace and daintiness. Softly curling golden hair here framed a face of rare loveliness of

expression, with features patrician in their modelling, and whose unblemished complexion was the pink and white velvet of the perfect blonde. Back of the coral lips of a sensitive, little mouth which seemed as though made only to be kissed, gleamed even, pearly teeth, while the nose above, with its little more than shadowy suggestion of tilt, lent a ravishing air of coquetry to her otherwise most demure face. The ears were perfectly shaped and dainty as sea shells. The eyes—large, wistful, expressive, dark—with their delicately arched brows and snowy curtains fringed with golden brown, reminded one of an April day with its alternate sunshine and shadow; being veritable windows of the soul; involuntarily dancing with joy at the pleasures, or melting in sympathy for the sorrows of those around her. In fact, if one wished to make special mention of the most beautiful feature of this wondrously beautiful face, it would be of the eyes, which were a true index to her very lovable and loving nature. If any more evidence were needed, a small, well shaped, well poised head and an aristocratic manner, told of the gentle Southern ancestry whence she had sprung, and through whom had descended to her not alone her rare personal beauty and charm, but also those exquisite graces of heart and mind with which she was most lavishly endowed.

Now these two young girls—our heroines—the one an idolized only child of a widowed mother of culture and means, the other completely orphaned, heiress to

a modest fortune and pitifully alone in the world, arriving at their chosen college simultaneously and being mutually drawn to each other at their first meeting, had elected to share a suite—parlour and bedrooms—in one of the residence halls upon the campus. Which arrangement continuing throughout the course had proven a blessing to both, since their combined natures, diverse, yet thoroughly congenial, formed a most harmonious whole; and the mutual considerateness shown during the early days of that unbroken and most intimate companionship, laid the foundation for the extraordinarily deep and lasting friendship which grew up between the two.

Vassar was at that time as it still is, one of our very best American schools for girls; its aim being to train and develop the physical, mental, moral and spiritual natures of its pupils in equal proportion, and thus to turn them out with well rounded characters. Their health was most carefully looked after in every respect, the particular kind of physical training being called for in each case being ordered and a certain amount of invigorating exercise required daily. Ample croquet grounds and a beautiful, gracefully willow-fringed lake, upon which to boat in Summer and skate in Winter, provided abundance of outdoor sport, while for indoors there was a well equipped gymnasium and a bowling alley. The several hundred acres of carefully laid out and beautifully kept grounds, the velvety lawns, the shady walks and nooks, the commodious

and artistic buildings, all combined to make it a very attractive place.

In the cultivation of pronounced talents, during their junior and senior years, Margaret had taken vocal music, Gertrude painting, as their extra studies, otherwise their tasks had been the same; and although it had required hard work to keep up with the very high standards of the college and discipline had been strict, yet a sufficient amount of relaxation and pleasure had been found in the social life among the students. The several special "Days," with their entertainments and functions, attendance upon the meetings of one or more of the various clubs—literary, scientific or social—the time spent in chapel, library, museum, laboratories, conservatory, art gallery, etc., had filled all the leisure moments and made the time pass quickly, even enjoyably; and now, when we meet our young friends for the first time,—

Schooldays are passed, their onerous tasks completed;

Schoolbooks discarded with relieved sighs.

Life's whirling register now waits their signing;

Eagerly they enroll to struggle for the prize.

For ready, they are now anxious to enter this larger school; whose list of needed supplies calls for only an account book, and where there is but one teacher, Experience. They have mastered all of the common and many of the higher branches of learning; can converse fluently and intelligently in more than their mother tongue, about Art and Science and Literature;

can draw and paint, compose and sing, and have their pretty heads full of isms and ologies and osophies. With the splendid assurance and confidence of youth, they feel themselves well able to grapple with all its most abstruse problems. Yet their hard earned diplomas entitle them to entrance only into the Kindergarten of *this* school. Deal gently with them, O, stern teacher! Make not their tasks too hard, or the punishment for possible mistakes too severe. When they leave thy walls for the Great University beyond, may it be with as good reports as Vassar sends them to thee; and may the harder and deeper lessons which *thou* hast taught them, have left their faces no less peaceful, aye, smiling, than we see them today.

During these student days, Gertrude had spent all her vacations, Summer and Winter, with Margaret. Mrs. Armstrong had been a real mother to the parentless girl, and she had long since accepted her invitation to reside with them after graduation; the two were now therefore *en route* for Denver and home, where a loving welcome awaited them both.

The day was warm even for the month; so after the manner of experienced travellers, they proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as possible for the long ride before them. Mentally tired from the strain of the closing examinations and the excitement of Commencement week, they were not in their usual chatty mood, so were soon buried in magazine and book.

At length, Gertrude, with a half suppressed sigh, laid hers aside, and turning to the open window sat for a long time looking out upon the constantly changing landscape, apparently lost in deepest meditation; but when Margaret, some later, turned to address a question to her, she was amazed to see one tear and then another roll slowly down the face of her companion.

"What! Little Sunbeam in tears?" burst out the girl in anxious wonderment—using the pet name her sunny disposition had gained for Gertrude at college—"Why, what's the matter, girlie? Are you sick? Aren't you glad we're going home?" she questioned hurriedly. And without waiting for a reply, leaned over, and slipping an arm tenderly about the neck of her *vis-a-vis*, drew the troubled face nearer and affectionately kissed her.

"Don't, Margaret"; pleaded the other gently, with an unsuccessful attempt at a smile. "Leave me to myself for a while, please; I'll be all right again soon." And pressing her friend's hand gratefully, the girl drew back and once more fixed her gaze upon the swiftly passing scenery.

A few moments—during which the puzzled Margaret tried vainly to account to herself for this most uncommon exhibition upon her friend's part—and she had recovered herself; and turning to her companion a tear-stained but triumphant face said: "Margaret, dear, I'm really ashamed to tell you of the selfish

thoughts that caused those recent tears, although I know they are forgiven even before confessed."

"Whatever they were, Gertie, you may be sure of that, and I cannot yet believe that they would answer to any one's description of selfish but your own, usual, exaggerated one; so 'fess up' and relieve me."

"I've never had any one but you to love, Margaret," now began the affectionate girl in a lowered tone, while taking her friend's hand lovingly between her own, "and you know how I worship you; and having had you all to myself for so long, it has been making me very unhappy to think of giving you up to, or even sharing you with, Aunt Nellie,—Mrs. Armstrong—as I shall have to do hereafter. But please don't tell her that I've ever harbored such horribly selfish, ungrateful thoughts. I wouldn't have her know it for *worlds* after all her many loving kindnesses to me; and besides, they're dead now, and will never come forth to haunt or trouble us again; not even their ghosts. But O, Margaret," she concluded, with an irrepressible sadness, "you can have no idea how desolate a girl feels, when she remembers now and again that she belongs to nobody, and nobody belongs to her."

"I presume not, Gertie," admitted the other, "and it's all the harder for me to understand *your* feeling that way, because Mamma and I have both loved you so dearly and for so long that we feel as though you belonged to us, and hoped you felt the same. I know Mamma thinks as much of you as she does of me, for

she *does* occasionally hold you up to me as an example, though I doubt if she has ever flattered me that much to you." She smiled, continuing, "In all her plans for me you are equally included. The coming out Tea this Fall and the trip abroad later, are as much for your benefit and pleasure as mine, you know that; while as for not 'belonging' to any one," she finished significantly, "I'm afraid it may not be very long before you allow a certain young man of our acquaintance to persuade you to give yourself to *him*; and then where will *I* come in?"

"There isn't the least danger of anything like that, Margaret," put in the other quickly, though with a sudden deep flush. "*Of course*," she went on, seriously, "I shall never marry any one with whom I am not desperately in love; but that will be an entirely different sentiment, and you will always be my very dearest friend. Even though life should some day separate us—which I pray it never may—no one could ever take your place, dear, or come between us. As Ruskin has put it you remember, One ought to be able to keep one's friends like one's wine, any number of years in the cellar, only to find it a little crusted at last but better in flavor than ever, so our friendship cannot help but grow sweeter and deeper."

"There's no question about that, dearie, so now cheer up and let's talk about the jolly Summer that's before us," rejoined Margaret, gaily. "I'm so glad that Mamma decided to re-open our home at the Lake,

this season. It's the *grandest* place, Gertie; you'll go just simply *wild* over the gorgeous scenery, and want to spend all your time sketching I'm afraid. Papa really discovered the spot and when I was a child we were about the only ones who went there; but gradually other families of our set have put up cottages, until this Summer there'll be quite a little colony of us. Papa loved the place so that of course Mamma would rather have spent every Summer there; but she is always so self-sacrificing you know, that for the last few years, since I have been at college, in fact, we have not been up, for she has felt that it would be too lonesome for you and me, perhaps, and beside, at our age we ought not to be deprived of the practical social education of the watering places; hence the delightful seasons we have had at Lake George, Long Branch and Saratoga. Which one do you think you really enjoyed the most, Gertie?" she queried in conclusion.

"They were each so delightful, Margaret," replied the other heartily—now in full *rapproch* with her friend's happy mood—"that it would be very hard to choose between them; still, I think the Long Branch and Centennial season pleased me a *little* the most. I enjoyed the Fair immensely, and then when we got to the ocean—my first experience, you know—the surf was simply glorious. We got to be pretty good swimmers, too, before we left, didn't we?"

"That's what we did, thanks to Mr. Nichols' help and instructions," assented the other. "And how

stunning we must have looked in those exquisite bathing suits, Gertie! And what a lot of other pretty clothes we had beside"; she went on, with a pleased, proud smile of recollection; "do you remember? That's one thing we haven't got to bother very much about this Summer, though, for at the Lake we shall practically live in our mountain suits, as we're going to do a good deal of semi-camping out; to rest up our nerves, as Mamma puts it, and fortify us for our first Winter in Society. But isn't that the last call for dinner?" she finished abruptly. "We'd better spruce up a bit and hurry in, or we shall be too late." And suiting the action to the word, the twain were soon giving their orders in the dining car.

"Through?" asked Gertie, as the other moved back her finger-bowl, at the close of the leisurely meal. Then rising, led the way back into the sleeper, where they settled themselves for a second perusal of Mrs. Armstrong's last letter, which, delayed in transit, had not been received until that very day just before the hour of their starting; hence hastily read. As their affairs are now becoming public property, we shall surely be pardoned for looking over and reading with them the following motherly effusion:

"Denver, Colo., June 15th.

My dear, dear daughter:—

Words cannot convey to you any idea of the depth of my disappointment at not being able to be with you for Commencement, for I have been looking so

joyously forward to that proud day all these lonely years that you have been away from me—of course I *should* have been *very* proud of you—and up to nearly the last I fondly hoped to be able to go. But my strength doesn't come, somehow, and the doctor would not give his consent; so I decided it would be the part of greater wisdom to bow to his will. Since my severe illness of the late Winter I haven't been my old self at all, although I have written you but little in reference to it. But I am hoping for great things from my Summer out of doors in the mountains. At the place I love best of all on earth and blessed with my dear child again with me, I believe that I shall be completely renovated. I *must* get well and strong by Fall, you know, for there's so much before us.

Will was as much disappointed as I at not being able to go on, but business called him to Chicago last night and will detain him until the twenty-fourth, so that he will only just be nicely through when you reach there. I am so rejoiced that you will then have our friend Mrs. Nichols and he with you for the rest of the way, for it would be a lonely and tedious trip for you and Gertie otherwise. It is hard for me to reconcile myself to the idea of you taking any part of it unescorted, but you have both had so much experience in traveling that I shall try not to worry.

I want that we should start for the Lake within a couple of days after you arrive, if possible. The Clarks, Chapins, Elliotts, Maynards, Somervilles, Har-

risons and Lindsays have already gone up and are entertaining large house parties. The other families will all open their homes within the next week, so you see there will be a numerous and congenial lot of young people around all the time, and I hope you will both enjoy the season as much as those spent at the large resorts. You know I live only for your happiness.

Tom and Winnie have been up for two weeks getting the cottage ready for occupancy once more; they returned last evening and tomorrow start back with the last load of furnishings. Winnie says: "Shure it's jist loike Hiven up there now, Mrs. Armsthrong, an' it 'll be a doin' yer that much good that yer'll be comin' back lukin' as rosy as the dawn an' tin years younger. But it's a sharp eye yer must be a kapin' on Miss Margaret an' Miss Gertie, fer there do be a power o' foine young men up there, but niver a gur'l did I see as cud tich aither o' thim fer sthyle an' beauty; an' it's that same I was afther tellin' Misther Nichols 'imsilf. O, but 'es the throe gintleman, God bless 'im! Didn't 'e take Tom down inter 'is mine whin 'e wint up ter give 'im yer letther, an' showed 'im all the sthones full o' goold, an' give 'im wan ter bring home ter me? It's a foine new shkiff 'e's got locked up in 'is boat-house; 'im a callin' it the *Gertie*, an' waitin' ter give 'is sishter-in-law frum Shecargo the furst ride in it. Leastways, that's what 'e was afther tellin' Tom; shure 'e wudn't expect *me* ter belave it."

"What are you blushing so for, Gertie"? asked the other, looking laughingly up.

"I'm *not* blushing, you tease!" affirmed the accused one, boldly, despite an uncontrollable rising of color; then—"please go on," she coaxed. And thus urged, the reader continued: "I shall not have Winnie come down again, but Tom will be back to take Mrs. Gardiner and me up in the carriage. The Rector and Harold take their horses of course, and will ride with you girls, Mrs. Nichols and Clayton. Peter will take Cécile, Norah, Mary and Mrs. Gardiner's maid in the carryall, and their—the Gardiner's—man will follow with the camp luggage and provisions in a big mountain wagon. We are all expecting to enjoy the trip up very much, making it leisurely so as not to be too fatiguing; I think we shall be about two weeks on the road.

"Will cannot get away for a week or two later, probably, but has planned to take a good long vacation when he does come,—the first in several years—and I hope he can then be with us for the rest of the season.

"Jacquard has just sent your mountain suits home; they are very jaunty affairs, sure to be becoming to you both. He goes abroad in July, and we must find time before we leave to give him instructions as to some of our Fall outfits; he returns in plenty of time for your Tea.

"But I must close. Goodbye for the last time, my dear child. I am counting the days—it will soon be

the hours—until I can again fold you to my heart ; and I shall be happy indeed when I am once more permitted to do that—for the years have been O, so lonely without you, Margaret—and to welcome Gertie to our little family circle ; she knows well how deeply I love her.

“Once more, *au revoir*. That God will have you in His care and keeping and bring you safe home, will be the constant prayer of—

Your loving Mother,”

There was a suspicious moisture in Margaret Armstrong’s eyes as she folded this precious missive and said to her friend : “I’m dreadfully worried about Mamma, Gertie, for she must be poorly indeed not to have come on this Summer. Winnie’s remark shows that she must even be looking very badly ; she watches Mamma’s health with the eyes of love, for she really has a very deep affection for her. You know she has been our laundress ever since Mamma was married, and considers herself a part of the family, although never presuming. She had been a most faithful servant, and when she and Tom were married—he has been coachman since I was quite a little tot—Mamma gave them two weeks of vacation ; and O, how proud it did make poor Winnie to be able to go off on a ‘toor’ like other folks. She positively worships Mamma ; in fact, all our servants do, for she makes the Golden Rule her guide in her treatment of them, just as she does in all the other relationships of life. Her

religion is so real; showing her faith by her works, daily; her purse is always open to the needy, every case of suffering or sorrow that she hears of appealing to her instantly. Papa was the same, and their life together was simply beautiful; I know if it had not been for my need of her, that Mamma would not have cared to nor have felt equal to the effort of living, after he was gone."

"She certainly is one of Nature's noble-women," returned the other warmly, "and we must be very watchful that she has no needless anxieties upon our accounts now; also that she doesn't over-do this Summer." Then concluded encouragingly: "She'll be so happy hereafter, dear, that it will surely help her to get well."

"God grant it!" murmured the anxious daughter in a subdued whisper, and then lapsed into silence; her prayer, for such it most truly was, wafted to Heaven on the soft evening breeze; her thoughts, no doubt, hastening on the fleet wings of love to the far distant parent. An hour later the familiar: "Shall I make up your berths, Miss?" aroused her from her reverie, and it was yet early when they had settled down for the night.

Now, it being the wish and purpose of the author that the characters of this story be known to the reader not merely by suggestion, but by intimate acquaintance as it were, while we leave our young heroines to wander with the sweet Spirit of Sleep through Dream-

land's fanciful realm, let us, through as brief introductions as may suffice, become acquainted with the three personages of Mrs. Armstrong's letter who must first be met with on the morrow: 'Mrs. Nichols,' 'Clayton' and 'Will.' And first, of course, the lady.

Mrs. George Benedict Nichols of Chicago—who journeys with us from this point of our story to its close, and whose recorded sayings and doings must therefore be either enjoyed or tolerated—was a petite brunette of the most pronounced type; stylish, extravagant, self-willed yet warm-hearted, irrepressibly good-humored, jolly and vivacious of disposition, an incorrigible flirt for the pure fun of the thing before her marriage, but who for upwards of three years antedating this period, had been the devoted young wife—she was now but two and twenty—of a man much more than twice her years. Nothing but the attraction of opposites could possibly have drawn this pair together, since they were as far apart as the poles, in every characteristic;—he was a big, handsome man and blonde, very serious minded, quiet and wedded to business. Yet it had been a true love match upon both sides, and Alice Adams—about whom envious, managing mammas had said many unkind, spiteful things, when her unexpected engagement to the good catch whom they had long vainly angled for, was announced—fairly worshipped the indulgent, appreciative husband whose wife she was most proud to be.

Now, this man of years and affairs—who would not

be hooked against his will—had unselfishly refrained from marrying younger, that he might give his undivided love and care and effort to the interests of the little brother fifteen years his junior, whose upbringing it had fallen to his lot to shoulder at the age of twenty; and not alone the upbringing of the child, but the winning of a competence if possible for them both from the small patrimony bequeathed them by their parents, by the time the younger should have reached the age of twenty-five; at which time, so it was ordered, division was to be made, two to one in favor of the elder. So abundantly had diligence and foresight been rewarded, that at the stipulated time, Clayton Nichols, an earnest, manly, fine looking fellow, well educated, with refined tastes and correct habits and happily in no wise lacking in gratitude to the brother who, both morally and materially, had so faithfully discharged his responsibility to him, came into possession of a comfortable little fortune, while the elder was rightly considered a moderately rich man; this competence having all been made in grain; a brokerage business, with occasional cautious speculating in the commodity, and with the resultant profits intelligently re-invested in Chicago real estate.

This comfortable condition of life having been attained, George Nichols married in the Fall of seventy-five, and immediately went abroad with his bride, returning the following Summer and together with the brother, Clayton, taking in our first world's fair, the

Centennial Exposition. It was while in Philadelphia for this purpose that the trio had first met Mrs. Armstrong and our girls, also bent upon the same errand.

Now the fact of Mr. Armstrong and Mr. Nichols having had some business acquaintance during the lifetime of the former, soon developing, proved at once a bond between them; and being a most congenial company from the start, it had been a mutual pleasure to find that Long Branch was their ultimate destination for the Summer, and as they were to put up at the same hotel, Mrs. Armstrong—who found no enjoyment in the gay scenes around her—had been well content to accept of the many offers of chaperonage for her young charges made by Mrs. Nichols. Accordingly, that vivacious little lady, the girls and Clayton Nichols, were very often to be found together, plunging and struggling in the waves, strolling idly along or lolling upon the glistening beach, in lively competition for honors in the bowling alley, waltzing away an exciting evening in the gay ballroom, or off on one or other of the various pleasurable jaunts with which the happy hours were whiled away; and it was to this season that Gertrude Warfield, it will be remembered, had referred as the one that ‘pleased *me* a *little* the most.’ How could it have been otherwise than a delightful season to the sweet and lonely young girl, when unmistakable and constant evidences of the deepest admiration of her upon the part of their gallant attendant, were so patent to all the rest of the party.

For both girls, however, September and a return to school came all too soon, although they had before them the prospect of again meeting with their agreeable new friends a few months later; Mrs. Armstrong having been prevailed upon to accept an invitation for the Christmas holidays for them and herself to the Nichols' home, Chicago. Here, we pause to state, they were most sumptuously entertained, and Mrs. Armstrong returning the courtesy the following year, the little party had therefore passed several very satisfactory and happy periods together before our acquaintance with them through this narrative. It was while upon this Denver visit of the previous year that George Nichols, to the delight of them all, had decided to build a Summer home upon the shores of beautiful Lake Sylvanus—where was situated that of the Armstrongs—and but little more than a mile from the 'Alice' mine, in which the brothers were largely interested.

An engineer by profession, Clayton Nichols, in the Spring of '78, had taken charge of this property to superintend its greater development. He was therefore in close proximity to the new mountain home at the Lake; and the name given to his new 'shkiff'—as quoted in Mrs. Armstrong's letter—showed that though out of sight, a certain much admired school-girl of his acquaintance had been by no means, out of mind.

Lastly, the 'Will' so familiarly referred to in the

foregoing epistle, was Willard Manning; at the time a prominent young Denver bachelor aged thirty-two, and the very capable cashier of the Armstrong-Sherwood Banking Company. He had come to its employ in a minor position some fourteen years before, during the late Mr. Armstrong's presidency, and being a distant family connection by marriage and stranger in the western city, had been asked into the home of his employer. This was about the time its daughter—twelve years his junior—was emerging from the nursery; and the child had grown up regarding him much as an indulgent elder brother. who brought her candies, let her beat him at dominoes, and was always on hand to act as master of ceremonies at her little parties.

Now Margaret Manning was one who grew and developed slowly; so that up to the time of her leaving home for college she had been to the young man but a nice, interesting little girl. At that age she gave scant promise of becoming the handsome, queenly miss described in this opening chapter. In fact, it was not until Margaret had about completed her eighteenth year that there was any very noticeable change in her appearance; then, all at once, she had seemed to burst from insignificant bud to full blown, gorgeous flower. Her Summer vacations had all been spent at Eastern resorts, as the reader already knows, the Winter ones either in New York or Chicago; all excepting the last, when she had come home accompanied by her chum and friends; hence, the young man had not seen the

girl in all those determining years, and was wholly unprepared for the changes they had wrought. For while with a cultured mother's loving pride Mrs. Armstrong had dilated to some extent upon her daughter's treasures of heart and mind, so that of these he was reasonably well aware, of her physical charms she had said but little; and Willard Manning's surprise, therefore, upon meeting with her again was only exceeded by his so glaringly evident admiration, that their guest at the time, Mrs. Nichols, who possessed an ungovernable *penchant* for matchmaking—she had mated Gertrude Warfield and her brother-in-law at their very first meeting—seeming to see in it another matrimonial possibility, had gleefully diagnosed his case to her husband as *incurably smitten*.

But the stay at home was short, barely one week, and the general entertaining to be done had afforded no opportunity for the paying of any marked attention to the girl, even had not the unfinished education have forbidden. On the evening after her departure, however, the enamored young man—with his natural directness—had informed the mother of his love for her daughter and asked permission to pay his addresses when she next returned. To his gratification this was given unhesitatingly; for truth to tell, Mrs. Armstrong had not been displeased at his apparent interest in her child.

"It is my wish and hope that Margaret shall be disposed to marry young, Willard," was her frank avowal,

“for I know that my days are numbered, and when the imperative summons shall come, it will materially lessen the pain of leaving her if I have already seen her happily settled in life. From my long and intimate knowledge of your character and worth, I should feel that her happiness would be safe in your keeping,” she went on with very flattering frankness, “and you therefore not only have my permission to press your suit, but my hearty good wishes for success as well. Although I shall neither say or do anything to influence Margaret’s choice; for it is a matter which vitally concerns her alone, and no faintest wish of mine shall sway her; but I *hope* you will win her.

“It is certainly more than gratifying to learn of the high esteem in which you hold me, Mrs. Armstrong,” replied the would-be son-in-law appreciatively, “and I thank you sincerely for so candid an expression; for I feel it to be the very greatest compliment that could be paid a man. Now that I have your consent I feel that Margaret is already mine, and believe me, it shall be the purpose and endeavor of my life to justify your great confidence in me,” he concluded, with characteristic earnestness and sincerity.

“Margaret has of course met but comparatively few gentlemen as yet, Willard,” resumed the mother after a slight pause. “I do not *think* her affections are centered in any one else, although Harold Gardiner has been wonderfully fond of her always; and when they met last Winter for the first time in several years, I

could plainly see that the old fondness had by no means died out. Now Margaret may care for him; I do not know as to that. He's a splendid fellow and his family of course, all that could be desired. Still he would not be *my* choice for her, for although there is several years difference in their ages, Margaret is such an uncommonly womanly girl as to seem considerably the older of the two; and I do not think she could ever look up to him to the extent *I* consider a woman wishes and ought, to her husband, for their greatest happiness. However, they will be much together this Summer, and I fancy it will soon be apparent what their feelings to each other now are. In fact, Mrs. Gardiner has hinted to me that Harold will be a suitor."

Unpleasantly surprised at this last statement, the aspiring lover at hand made no immediate move to reply; so his companion went on: "I feel equally anxious as to Gertie's future, for she could not be dearer to me were she and Margaret sisters. A girl so extremely beautiful both in looks and character, having her accomplishments and independent means, will undoubtedly be much sought after. She is so essentially loving in nature, too, that I imagine she will be inclined to marry soon; especially as not having the same force and independence in her makeup as our Margaret, she really needs some one to lean upon and cling to. She is also generous to an extreme degree, and to the man whom she loved she would give her all; which makes it so important that he be worthy

of her. In that case Gertie will be one of the most radiantly happy women on earth; living in and for her husband. But should she make an unfortunate marriage she would be crushed, heart-broken; and I believe God would show scant mercy to the ingrate who should be responsible for the wreck of so lovely a being."

"She certainly *is* a very sweet and charming girl," asserted her listener heartily. "Clayton Nichols thinks a heap of her, doesn't he?"

"O, yes; that's very evident," laughed Mrs. Armstrong. Adding: "And I think she does of him, too. I sincerely hope so, for in that case I should feel no further anxiety. There isn't a finer young man than he living, and Gertie and he would make a perfectly ideal couple. Margaret and she are so utterly wrapped up in each other that I hope they may never be separated, even in their married life," she finished.

From that time Margaret, naturally, had been a constant topic of conversation between these two, and the being with her upon her graduation day the pleasure to which both had looked joyfully forward; though of the disappointment to their hopes in this respect, we have already learned by letter.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUED—THE TRIP TO THE LAKE.

"When Clayton Nichols and Harold Gardiner unexpectedly swung aboard of their still moving train as it rolled into the Denver depot, they found a very merry party of travelers to welcome."

As the train bearing our young friends homeward slowed down at Englewood—a suburban town some seven miles east of Chicago—the following day, Gertrude, seated by the open window intent upon the fascinating story with which Margaret regaled her, suddenly interrupted the reading to exclaim: "Why, there's Mr. Manning now, as I live!" at the same time smiling, bowing and waving her hand.

"No! Where?" burst out her companion; excitedly dropping her book and looking out.

"He's just gotten aboard!" returned the other. And jumping up both girls hastened to the door of the car to greet their unexpected escort.

Now Margaret Armstrong being as yet in ignorance of the young man's declaration to her mother, was therefore under no constraint; so there was the old time charming naturalness in her reception of him. "O, Will!" she cried; extending both hands, her beautiful face wreathed in smiles. "How delighted I am

to see you! This is just the loveliest surprise! Why, I had never thought that you might come out a ways!" And voice, looks and manner, all combined to give added emphasis to her emphatically warm, welcoming words.

"The pleasure is all mine, Margaret," returned the man even more cordially. "Why, I would gladly have traveled much further if necessary, for such a reception as *this*." And pressing the girl's hands warmly as he spoke, he released but one of them as he took the extended hand of her friend; saying as he did so: "And I am truly delighted to have the pleasure of meeting Miss Warfield again."

"It's mutual, I assure you, Mr. Manning. I never had a pleasanter surprise in my life than when I saw you standing there on the platform."

"But how did you leave Mamma, Will?" broke in Margaret, when they had seated themselves for a moment in one of the unoccupied sections of their car. "I'm *so uneasy* about her!"

"Yes; how *is* Aunt Nellie?" chimed in the other girl, quickly. "I'm fully as anxious about her as Margaret, for you know she's going to mother me, too, hereafter."

"Well I'm sorry to say that she hasn't been just herself for some time," was the discouraging reply, "and has seemed to miss you more this term, Margaret, than ever before. I've sometimes thought, in fact, that it was as much that which ailed her as anything. But

your return and the Summer at the Lake are going to do wonders for her, I think; she feels so herself, too, and that's half the battle, you know, so they're sure to. She's so pleased that you're coming to live with us now, Miss Warfield; you may not know it, but she thinks as much of you as though you were her own child; she has told me so in plain English. You are a very fortunate young lady, I think, to be loved so deeply by such a splendid woman."

"I don't *think*; I *know* I am, Mr. Manning, and I hope I value her interest in me at its true worth"; replied Gertrude. "I should be lonely indeed today were it not for her love and Margaret's."

"And that of a certain young gentleman whom we all know?" laughed the other.

"Now, Mr. Manning,"—the girl blushed—"I do hope you are not going to be as mean as Margaret upon that subject; she is continually teasing, when *really* there is no grounds for it at all. Of course, I think Mr. Nichols a very nice young man, and I hope we shall always be the best of friends. But—"

"Who said anything about Mr. Nichols, I'd like to know?" interrupted Margaret, with a mischievous smile. "O, Gertie, you are such an ingenuous little dear! A guilty conscience; eh, Will?" she finished, teasingly.

"It certainly looks that way," assented the young man. Adding heartily: "But it's nothing to be the least bit ashamed of, Miss Warfield, for Clayton's as fine a

fellow as God ever made, and I herewith offer my services to give you away."

"Thanks, awfully!" returned the embarrassed girl. "You're dreadfully kind, though much too previous." And then to change the subject, quickly suggested bidding Mrs. Winslow—a traveling acquaintance in the car ahead—goodbye.

"Why, yes"; promptly agreed her companion. "I had nearly forgotten her in the happy surprise of seeing Will. You'll excuse us for a moment?" to the young man as they arose to leave him.

Aglow with admiration, Willard Manning's eyes followed the object of his deepening love as she moved with her usual dignified grace down the long aisle; for was she not now—to his ardent imagination—a thousand times lovelier than when he had bade her a reluctant farewell that interminable six months before? Her demonstration upon meeting him had left nothing to be desired, and there was no doubting the sincerity of it. True, he could attach no significance to her familiarity of address, for having entered Mr. Armstrong's employ and their home, so young, he had never been anything but Willard, or Will, to any of the family; yet to his excited longing, there had seemed almost a caress in the soft, sweet tones of her musical voice and the kindling glances of her lustrous eyes. The almost imperceptible yet spontaneous pressure of her hand had thrilled his being and fascinated more even than she had previously done.

"At least," thought he, "I am not distasteful to her, and it will be the first failure to my credit if I do not succeed in winning her love and making her life happy. She *must* be mine! With her beauty of face and form, her wealth of affection, her bright, intelligent mind and her culture and accomplishments, she will be pleasing to the eye of her husband, satisfying to his heart, stimulating to his ambition, and gratifying to his pride. Her lively sympathies will cheer and comfort him when depressed, her saintly purity of thought and action be at once a rebuke and example when tempted, and her dignified reserve and repose of manner a rest to him when wearied. As a mother, she would be unselfishly loving, though firm, wise, capable; commanding alike the grateful affection, obedience, respect and admiration of her children, thus making of his home a haven of peace and happiness. Yes, she *must* be mine!" he mused with still greater positiveness.

But the girl just then reappearing in the doorway, a recollection of the proposed rival—as confided to him by Mrs. Armstrong—flashed through the infatuated man's mind. "Harold Gardiner be hanged!" he muttered impatiently. "I like his presumption, anyhow! That boy needs to be taught a lesson, and he'll not find me napping when I appear upon the scene!" All of which proves our hero to have been—of the Earth, earthy.

"Any baggage to be looked after?" he asked, gaily,

when the girls had rejoined him, and the clanging bell, creaking airbreaks and slackened speed, warned them of their near-by destination.

"No, our trunks are checked right through," answered Margaret.

"Well, then, give me your traps"; as the train—with the usual unbalancing jerk—came to a sudden standstill. And with no more than the ordinary amount of feminine hand baggage, the little party alighted; amid the roar and rumble of in-coming and out-going trains, the confused hurrying hither and thither of arriving and departing passengers and the mad rush of the belated to their all but moving ones, the peremptory commands of burly policemen, the persistent importunities of hotel runners and cabmen, and the general ear-splitting, nerve-racking din and bustle of a Chicago railway station, making their way to Mrs. Nichol's carriage in waiting to convey them across the city to their connecting train; where they joined that lady and continued the homeward journey.

It was a jolly ride from there on, as well it might be. The man, for the time being, in the intoxication of an as yet unspoken love, must give vent in some way to the exuberance of happiness within him; and therefore outdid himself, even, in gallantry,—he was a universal drawing-room favorite—anticipating every possible and impossible need or wish that could in any degree add to the greater comfort or pleasure of his charges.

The girls, fresh from the restraints of school, happy

in the satisfied consciousness of completed tasks well done, and looking out upon life with confidence in themselves and faith in humanity, anxious to taste because sure of enjoying every new sensation and experience in store for them, were radiant with expectation and hope.

While Mrs. Nichols—as good-humored and vivacious as ever—kept the party keyed up to an unusual pitch of merriment; the only regret—and which really did seem to sober her for an occasional moment—being the fact that business had compelled Georgie—she was an original, unconventional little body, and would persist in calling her big husband by this absurdity childish name—to go over to London, instead of spending this first Summer in their new mountain home with her, as had been expected.

“Clayton writes that the bungalow’s exquisite,” she said—pausing to explain that her brother-in-law was then rustivating at the Lake—“but he’s getting awfully impatient for our arrival. Says there’s a fine big crowd there all the time, but that he can’t settle down to enjoying himself ’til we get there.”

“Yes,” returned Margaret, “and he’s got a fine new boat that he’s waiting to give you the first row in”; with a knowing glance at Gertie. But checked by the look of mute appeal and entreaty which she met, concluded innocently with, “Do you know what he’s named it?”

“Why, no”; was the quick reply. “I didn’t even know

that he'd gotten one, especially for himself; but I presume he wants to surprise me. And so he's not going to use it 'til *I* come?" she queried after a second's thought. "Now isn't that just too lovely of him? How that will please Georgie! There's a brother-in-law for you!" Concluding with one of her occasional lapses into slang: "O, Clayton's a brick!" And as the girls just then discovered something unusually interesting in the scenery, their amused smiles escaped observation.

"But girls, aren't you delighted to be through with school?" she began a minute later, addressing them both. "I really don't see how you ever stood four years of it; why two at Geneva came near to finishing *me* in more ways than one. You know I didn't want to go at all, for to leave Joe, Will and Judson—my three pal brothers—and live with nobody but girls, I knew would be just next to Purgatory for me; though I've no doubt I needed it bad enough, for growing up with no one but boys for companions—my sisters were all much older—I was a dreadful tomboy. But don't you think it's very narrowing to her for a girl to spend so many of her most impressionable years exclusively with her own sex, Mr. Manning?" she finished.

"O, I don't know about that, Mrs. Nichols"; replied the man, conservatively; adding, "although it's a subject I've never thought much about, to be candid. Co-educational institutions have their advantages, I presume, and like all other good things their disadvantages as well. But you could hardly expect me to take

a bold stand in favor of them, in presence of such flattering tributes to Geneva and Vassar as the present."

"Why, no! To be *sure* not!" acquiesced his interrogator, with mock deference. "Girls, make your very prettiest bow to the gentleman for such an unexpected compliment!" she commanded; continuing, "And now tell me all about Commencement; what were you down for, Gertie dear?"

"Just an essay on Italian art," replied the girl, with careless modesty; then quickly, "but you should have heard Margaret sing! Such exquisite music! I shall never forget Professor Muller's face as he listened to her. She was his star pupil, you know," she hurried on,—ignoring her friend's efforts to stop her—"and he tried his best at first to appear unconcerned; but it was such a *dismal* failure. There wasn't the least bit of anxiety in his expression; no, no; he was too sure of her for that; but oh, such intense pride! I really believe he loved her for the moment, because of the glory she was reflecting upon him. Like all fine musicians, I presume, he's of a very high strung temperament, and as her pure notes rose and fell and rose again, gradually swelling clearer and sweeter to the *finale*, with all those many delicate shadings of tone and expression which he says Margaret, more than any other pupil he ever had, has caught from him, why he became dead to the world; he leaned forward in his chair breathless, actually trembling. His eyes never left her face; he seemed

to be really lifted out of himself, and I half expected to see him spread wings and soar away. But the funny part of it was," she went on merrily, "he didn't seem to realize that she had finished, even when she was bowing again and again in acknowledgment of the applause and accepted flowers. He never *would* have quite come back to Earth again, I'm afraid, if Professor Loquet, who sat next him—almost equally entranced—had not leaned over and exclaimed in a stage whisper; 'Ah, Mademoiselle! she have ze art! I congratulate Monsieur of such a pupil!' That broke the spell and poor professor sank back in a state of reactionary collapse," finished the amused girl, laughing merrily at the recollection.

Her friend's face was of course by this time covered with a most becoming blush; and with assumed severity she remarked: "Whatever else you are or are not, Gertie, *do* be truthful."

"It *is* the truth, every word of it," persisted the girl. "From where I sat I could see and hear it all."

"And we believe every word of it, Miss Warfield," put in their escort, reassuringly; "while your very vivid description, by the way, makes me realize for the first time what I missed by not being there. We shall expect Margaret to make up for our loss, shall we not, Mrs. Nichols, by giving us some rare entertainment during the summer? Moonlight evenings on the Lake with such music will, I fear, make the angels take to pausing there, to doubt if Eden were more fair; to borrow an inadequate simile," he concluded flatteringly.

"O, dear me! how poetic!" Mrs. Nichols laughed, with good-natured sarcasm. "A dreadfully bad sign though, Mr. Manning; there's no further doubt as to *your* being in love; that's sure. 'When a young man takes to rhyme,' you know. There, don't blush!" And during the laugh which followed at his expense, Margaret's mental ejaculation was: "*Will in love!* well that's news to *me!* Some Chicago friend of her's I presume, which accounts for these *business* trips there every now and then. O, how Mamma and I would miss him!"

Thus, with lively sallies and conversation and no untoward incident to mar its pleasure, the two days' journey seemed made as quickly as it certainly was enjoyably; and when Clayton Nichols and Harold Gardiner unexpectedly swung aboard their still moving train as it rolled into the Denver depot, they found a very merry party of travelers to welcome.

Now, while Mrs. Nichols refrained for once from any embarrassing comment, she nevertheless did not fail to note every detail of the meeting between Gertrude Warfield and her brother-in-law, at this time. The happy smile which instantly illumined the girl's face at sight of him, the tell-tale flush that mounted to cheek and brow as he took her dainty hand in both of his, and the conscious look in her expressive eyes ere they were modestly lowered under his admiring gaze, were enough to assure her that the *match* upon which she had determinedly set her heart, could but materialize, and she was therefore satisfied and happy.

Willard Manning, on the other hand, had noted the meeting between his beloved and Harold Gardiner, with still more critical observation but far different emotions. Much as he longed to, he could not flatter himself that there had been any greater apparent warmth in the girl's greeting of himself at Englewood; while the unconcealed delight of the younger man at seeing her again, together with a certain undefinable *something* in manner as he assisted her from the car,—which, to his jealous eye, betokened a seeming sense of ownership—combined to disconcert and annoy. But the frown, which, unrealized by himself, began to settle upon his face, was unnoticed by any save Mrs. Nichols, and as quickly banished as it had come, by her jocular: "Fie, Mr. Manning! haven't you had her to yourself for two whole days?" uttered in an undertone as the twain were leaving the car together.

"Is Mamma down, Harold?" asked Margaret, as she reached the platform; and being answered in the affirmative, at once left her disappointed gallant with a hurried, "Excuse me, please?" And with most undignified haste for her, made her way through the crowded depot to their waiting carriage and into her mother's outstretched arms.

Now, as Mrs. Armstrong had hoped, two bustling days following this arrival, sufficed to complete preparations for the departure to the mountains, and towards noon of the third, probably as happy, high-

spirited and enthusiastic a party of pleasure seekers left Denver as ever set off upon similar errand from anywhere. The contented happiness at having her precious child again at home, together with the pleasurable excitement of their now numerous household—which had inevitably communicated somewhat of itself to her—had brought a tinge of color to relieve the of late, extreme pallor of skin; and this seemingly quick improvement in condition, even though slight, had tended to set the loving daughter's fears at rest, and to lift from her heart the weight of anxiety which had at first settled down upon it, because of her mother's sadly changed appearance. Healthy youth is always optimistic, so Margaret Armstrong was now full of hope for permanently good results from this outing in her parent's case, and her spirits rose to the occasion accordingly.

Like most Western girls of their class, both she and Gertrude Warfield were fine horse-women, having learned to ride when very young; while Mrs. Nichols was no less proficient in the accomplishment, for, from early childhood—as our readers will probably be not the least surprised to know—she had been accustomed to riding Indian fashion, on her grandfather's farm in Illinois, along with those 'pal brothers.' The younger ladies of the party were therefore well fitted for the two weeks before them in the saddle, and as impatiently longing for its anticipated pleasure; while

to escort them, there were Mr. Gardiner, his Son, Harold, and Clayton Nichols, with Willard Manning accompanying them for the first miles, and cleverly managing for that distance to maintain a coveted position at Margaret Armstrong's side.

Now it will require but a very slight stretch of the imagination, we think, for the reader to accurately picture to him or herself, this young man's feeling of regret, not to say rebellion almost, against the unkind fate which necessitated his remaining in Denver at this critical time, and leaving the girl he now so dearly loved to the constant and intimate association of camp life with a rival; and one whom, the very short time which had elapsed since her return home, had convinced him would be no half-hearted suitor for her affections. For the first time in his life, was the industrious fellow tempted to let business take care of itself, and more than half regretted that he had not dropped everything and gone with the rest. "Surely he had worked long and faithfully enough," he argued with himself. "Not for five years had he taken a vacation at all; and if by such exaggerated devotion to a possibly mistaken sense of duty at this time, he should lose *her*—the *very life of his life*—what would it all amount to? Advancement and financial gain could mean nothing to *him* without *her* to share them."

Thus did the discontented, fearsome lover contrive to make himself quite as miserable as any other mere man in like situation would have done; for the little

God of Love is no respecter of persons. What needless anxiety would it have saved him, however, had he but known of the very faithful and effective ally which he possessed in Mrs. Armstrong; who, while she had not the least intention of influencing her daughter in his favor, despite her own preferences, wished him to at least have an even chance with any other suitor, and greatly astonished herself by the adroitness which she developed in so handling the difficult situation as to keep her unenlightened daughter and Harold Gardiner most of the time apart; thus making of that other young couple—under the self-constituted but truly sympathetic chaperonage of Mrs. Nichols—a constant source of envy to the impetuous Harold.

And certain it is that these other two were being favored with a most auspicious opportunity at this time for the deepening of the very warm friendship which had long existed between them, and which was already dangerously near to infringing upon the border-line of a more serious attachment.

Now, as we have seen her pictured, Gertrude Warfield was a being made essentially to love and be loved, and the pathetic aloneness of her life had begotten in the girl an almost abnormal craving for some one really entitled to claim and return her affection. The reader must not make the mistake of supposing, however, that she was an anaemic, sickly-minded miss, who went about wearing her heart upon her sleeve.

Far from it; she was both too well born and bred for any of those silly, sentimental looks, words or actions, by which girls of weaker natures or less well instructed than herself, frequently make a premature or unfortunate revelation of love to members of the opposite sex, always to their embarrassment and often to their ultimate undoing. But Clayton Nichols was a delightfully congenial companion, and in so far as she knew it, there was not a characteristic of his nature which did not appeal to her admiration. Yet if she was at this time actually in love with the man, the girl was scarcely aware of it herself.

Upon his part, however, love had been the animating spirit prompting his marked attentions to Gertrude at their first meeting. It had grown with both succeeding ones, and now that she was out of school, he had no intention of letting the summer pass without offering to her his heart and hand. She was *the* girl for him; and while realizing that so capital a prize could not remain long in the matrimonial market, he nevertheless believed himself to be sufficiently *persona grata* with her as to take precedence over other aspirants.

His was too correct and delicate a sense of the proprieties, however, to incline to love-making under such conspicuously vulgar and embarrassing environment as their present one; and even had he been so disposed, such a course would have been ruinous with a girl such as Gertrude. All he asked for the

nonce, therefore, was to be much in her company—of which he was naturally more than fond—and this the trip to the Lake—he had journeyed to Denver solely for this purpose—gave him constantly the most delightful opportunities for enjoying, making of it for him a glorious holiday; in fact, for them both.

Now as her friend had prophesied, the girl's artistic tastes *were* enraptured, even long before their destination had been reached; and when some particularly fascinating bit of scenery would now and then tempt her irresistibly down some trail or by-path for a few moments for "*just one more sketch*," what more natural than that Mr. Nichols should be the one who hastened to assist her to dismount; part the tangled vines and underbrush that she might pass easily and safely through; the only reward he craved for such gallantry being the privilege of feasting his eyes upon her loveliness, even though apparently forgotten by her in her absorption. And then those *wonderful* sketches; now the girl *had* unmistakable ability as an artist; but for him, no Corot or Inness could compare with them.

There was, however, none of that pre-arranged yet seemingly accidental separating of these two from the rest of the party so often indulged in by young people of different mold under like circumstance; so with the six horses and their riders, together with the carriage, carry-all and luggage wagon before alluded to, for a family party of fourteen they surely formed quite an imposing cavalcade, and from daylight to dark

its merriment echoed and re-echoed up and down the mountain side; while gathered around their evening campfire, song and jest and story made the closing hours of each day most jolly.

Perfect arrangements for camping in the most comfortable manner, and the well-planned, easy stages of the journey, made every moment a delight. The perpetual sunshine, clear, dry atmosphere, and cool, invigorating breezes—which combine to make the climate of this, one of our most favored states, famous for its health-giving qualities the world over—proved such an immediate tonic to them all, that the hearty appreciation of her efforts as their appetites increased, made the heart of Mary, the cook, to swell with pride, daily.

Until Colorado Springs was reached their course lay through the foothills; for although the elevation at this point is close to six thousand feet, it is in reality a city of the plains, being but a few hundred higher than Denver, their starting point.

Now to a real lover of nature there is always much to admire and enjoy, even *in* the foothills; and Mrs. Nichols and Gertrude, those two members of the party who were making a maiden trip into this superb region, were most enthusiastic even before the actual ascent had begun. But it was not until a climb of a few miles disclosed to their view in the distance the towering summits of the rocky formations of every conceivable shape which form the noted Garden of the

Gods, a little higher, and Colorado City, the first capital of the State could be distinctly seen, yet a trifle higher and Manitou Springs—that famous Spa of the West, to whose healing waters thousands of invalids now go yearly—came into sight nestling modestly in a cleft of the mountain, that they began even meagerly to imagine the endless charm and magnificence of the grand old Rockies; and a little later when, after ascending a most beautiful canyon through which their route lay, they suddenly discovered below them, probably a thousand feet though but a few miles back, Colorado Springs, from whence they had begun the ascent, their delighted astonishment can be better imagined than described. Here a most gorgeous sunset claimed their admiration, and furnished Gertrude another subject.

Two days of rest, and with the next ascent came an entirely new revelation. They had mounted but a few hundred feet higher, when, presto! a panorama of indescribable splendor spread out before them. As far as the eye could see, stretching away to the seemingly limitless horizon, were vast plains dotted now and again with shimmering lakes; the silvery sheen of whose transparent waters glistening in the sunlight, formed a picture the most dazingly beautiful.

Thus did each day, almost hour, bring some new delight; not to the strangers alone—although such prodigality of magnificence frequently made even

the ready wit and tongue of Mrs. Nichols, mute, save for an awe-struck, 'O, if *Georgie* were only here!'—but to them all; for let one be never so familiar with it, there is always some new beauty, some new charm discernible in mountain scenery, for it is constant change.

Another ascent, and instead of the scattered beauties of boundless plain, would loom the confined, entrancing glories of some deep, dark mountain gorge through which to pick their way, whose massive granite walls, towering so high, almost hid their aspiring heads in the clouds above; while down their rugged sides at frequent intervals fell beautiful cascades, descending in gentle, graceful fashion to feed the rippling brooks and streams flowing quietly along at their feet, or leaping and tumbling in mad haste, to dash with angry roar through boulder-filled chasms, sending their glittering spray high in air, then rushing thence to lose themselves in the rapid rivers.

With another advance, would frequently appear some new and still more stupendous exhibition of Nature's handiwork to hold them spellbound. Aggregations of huge boulders, for centuries untold the sport of the elements, split and rent by storms into all manner of grotesque shapes; smooth, polished platforms, massive domes, gigantic and slender steeples, arches, castles, battlements. Ofttimes hurled together by some mighty upheaval in inextricable confusion, and the whole frescoed with such exquisite colorings, so bright, so rich, so varied, as if the angels who paint

the colors of the sunset had tried their brushes on the faces of the eternal hills; as one has so gracefully expressed it.

Again would their way lead through dense primeval forests of pine and spruce, every breath of whose fragrance as they drank it in was like a quaff of nectar, up and down untimbered slopes where the wondrously variegated verdure was unspeakably luxuriant and beautiful, or by crystal mountain torrents, over swollen creeks and through winding canyons, until the varied charm of their route to the beautiful lake lying serenely pocketed within its mountainous inclosure ten thousand feet above the level of the sea, reduced description to the very verge of penury.

Now there is not a spot on earth where a sense of the infinite variety and stupendous grandeur of creation arrests the attention, excites the admiration and compels the reverence, more than this very section of our own blessed land; where from tiniest rill to mightiest river; from meanest shrub to most gigantic sentinel of the forest; from smallest pebble to hughest boulder and grandest mountain, all, all proclaim, the hand that made us is divine.

In contemplation of such immensity, man seems small indeed by contrast; yet, in His infinite love, has not the same Creator bestowed upon him alone—His crowning work—the genius and power to subdue it all to his uses, pleasures, profit? ‘O, that men would praise the Lord for His goodness and for His wonderful works toward the children of men!’

CHAPTER III.

THE TRAIL—A PROPOSAL.

“‘I know that when love **does** awaken in your heart that you will be aware of it, and that it cannot **help** but be for **me**.’”

Fun and frolic reigned supreme among the little colony at Lake Sylvanus; every week was carnival week; there were no unoccupied, few quiet and no dull moments. One enthusiastic writer in dilating upon the climate of Colorado has said—From July to October it has almost continual bright, cloudless days. An air more delicious to breathe cannot be found anywhere. It is neither too sedative nor too exciting; but has that pure, flexible quality which seems to support all one's healthiest and happiest moods. And this unexaggerated eulogy seemed particularly true of this particular locality. The days were *grand!* the nights *glorious!*

The score of cottages of hewn or unhewn logs, each of whose owners had, in a spirit of friendly rivalry, aimed to make *it* just a trifle more attractive than its neighbor, detracted no whit from the natural beauties of the place; so that whether by the moon's bright rays or the artificial illumination from the thousands of vari-colored lanterns with which porches,

grounds, boat houses and landings were universally hung, the scene by night was like an enchanted picture from fairyland.

With but few exceptions, each home furnished at least one vocalist or performer upon some stringed or wind instrument, so music and dancing were therefore the chief features of entertainment by night; while by day, delightful jaunts and rambles were the usual programme. Frequently these excursions were participated in by the women and children of the camp alone, the men enjoying themselves with hunting and fishing, for the mountain streams abounded in all manner of delicious fish, while game, both large and small was plentiful in its season; and it spoke well for the skill of the sportsmen that the table of the camp was kept well supplied with these.

There was a constant round of festivities, each cottage furnishing the hostess in turn; but the event of the season to which all were looking eagerly forward was the opening of the Nichols' bungalow,—that being the only new addition—for the house-warming planned for the occasion by its hospitable young mistress, promised to be a truly sumptuous affair.

Two motives, we doubt not, impelled her to this elaborateness; first, she was generous to an extreme, and loved to see and make others happy; and secondly, there was a childish love of showing off strong within the woman. It must be remembered, however, that she was yet very young. Of that to us, baser motive,

a desire to outshine, we doubt if there was an atom in her make-up.

All sorts of delicacies, regardless of expense, had been sent up in profusion for the banquet which she purposed spreading. The affair, of course, was not to come off until the arrival of Mr. Manning. Mrs. Armstrong giving a Tea in her friend's honor in the meantime, at which the woman's lively wit and humor made her an instant favorite with her neighbors, a very few of whom she had met during her short Denver visit of the winter before; and it was unanimously agreed that little Mrs. Nichols would make a very desirable addition to their ranks.

Now it was on the morning after their arrival at the Lake, that Clayton Nichols—with somewhat of pardonable pride—was disclosing to his sister-in-law the attractions of her new place; the well-prepared croquet ground, pretty little rustic nooks and arbors and bridges with which the grounds were adorned, the tempting settees and reclining chairs with and without protecting awnings placed at frequent intervals in convenient spots, and the capacious hammocks swung between the noble trees, all inviting to rest or enjoyment, the arrangement of which he had superintended and to a large extent planned.

Taking her last of all to the little wharf where the 'Alice' lay moored awaiting her pleasure, the sight of a second boathouse at the landing suddenly recalled to mind a part of Margaret Armstrong's remarks

while *en route* from Chicago, but which the excitement of the two busy days while in Denver and the enjoyment of the trip up, had caused her to forget. In her impetuous way she burst out with: "O, *your* boat's in there, I suppose, Clayt! do show it to me! Margaret told us about it and about your waiting for me to have the first row in it. I think that's *just too lovely* of you for anything, brother, and really, it quite touched me. Just imagine how pleased *Georgie* will be to hear of it. What have you named her? Margaret didn't seem to know."

Now these questions and request surprised her companion almost into speechlessness for the moment, for having told no one of his purchase, he felt quite at a loss to account for Margaret Armstrong's knowledge of the matter;—he had quite forgotten Tom, the coachman's, accidental seeing of it and his blundering excuse for the deferred launching—but recovering himself he replied: "Yes, I *have* got a boat tucked away there, Alice, but how that girl got wind of it in New York, confound it, I can't for the life of me make out. Ordinarily," he continued apologetically, "you know I wouldn't refuse any request of yours; but it's a bit of a whim of mine"—in an offhand manner—"not to have it seen or its name known for a while yet; I'm really very glad Margaret's knowledge didn't include the latter. Sooner or later—it will depend—but before the summer's over, I expect to launch it and under such auspices as I rather be-

lieve you, Sister, will approve, even though you should be disappointed about having the honor of the christening row; which, candidly, I hope you will" he added, with a give-a-way smile he tried in vain to repress. "But if you don't happen to be one of the first party, Alice, you shall be of the second, and I hope that will be satisfactory. Don't press me for reasons, please, and then if you should be asked any questions you can truthfully say you don't know."

With a knowing glance and smile, the listening woman answered quickly, as he concluded: "You need have no fears about my not keeping your secret, brother; I shall be as dumb as an oyster on the subject, and sincerely hope you *won't* ask me to be your companion on your first row. *Under the circumstances,*" she continued, with meaning emphasis on the words,—feeling at once and with a pleasurable thrill, that Gertrude Warfield was at the bottom of all this concealment—"I'm much more than willing to play second fiddle; besides, I've my own boat to enjoy, you know. Of course what's mine's yours, Clayton," she volunteered heartily, "and until you want this craft of mystery to appear upon the scene, I hope you'll use the 'Alice' as freely as if she were your own. Isn't she a beauty? I shall dip those oars the very first thing after breakfast. Thank goodness! There's the bell now," she concluded, with a delighted start. "Let's go right in, for I'm decidedly famished; this mountain air has given me a perfectly ravenous appetite.

Isn't this a *heavenly* morning?" she ran on, as they turned towards the house. "O, if *Georgie* were only here!" And a very visible shade of regret for her husband's absence, passed over the emotional face of this devoted and loving young wife.

The well-prepared, well-served meal was barely finished, when the splashing of oars and a repeated 'Hoo-hoo' from the Lake, drew the couple hurriedly to the windows of the breakfast room which faced it, when they were no less delighted than surprised to see the girls, with Harold Gardiner, who was just in the act of fastening Margaret's boat to the landing; and Clayton, all smiles, of course, rushed down to the wharf to meet them, calling out gaily as he went, "Well, well, this is surely a jolly surprise to begin the day with! Good morning, girls; hello, Harry; let me assist you, Miss Armstrong," to Margaret, as he reached the landing, and afterward to her companion, who followed.

Dressed in a natty costume of embroidered white duck edged with blue, which set off the delicate purity of her complexion to perfection, and a jaunty little cap to match which became the girl most admirably, Gertrude Warfield certainly did look, as Margaret had effusively told her at starting, simply sweet enough to kiss. Never had she appeared so bewitching to her admirer as now; and as she laid her soft, white hand in his and leapt lightly ashore, a thrill of unspeakable pleasure shot through the young man's frame, and his

heart gave an involuntary bound as a vision of the proud and happy day when, as he fondly hoped, he would be privileged to call this dainty creature his own, flashed before his mind.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Nichols, who now came running smilingly down the lawn. "Why didn't you come before breakfast? You must surely have gotten up in the middle of the night";—it was then barely eight-thirty.—"I thought *we* did well but you evidently beat us. But I'm *awfully* glad to see you, just the same," kissing them warmly, as she slipped an arm around each of the girls and started for the house.

"That's pretty nearly what Gertie did," said Margaret, "for she was up long before daylight. I knew it would be that way as soon as we got here; she'd want to spend all her time sketching. I told her she would."

"O, not all of it, dear," protested her friend sweetly; "though I really *did* have an ambition to do the *first* sunrise; and oh, but it was *grand*! I expect it to be one of the very best of my collection. But what a garden spot this is. I never saw such a perfect Paradise before! And what a lovely home you have, Mrs. Nichols!" as a partial view of the attractive domicile was obtained through the branching trees left standing to shade its lawn. "There's only one objection to it, however, and that can't be remedied, I'm afraid; it's too far away from *us*." For the lake was more than a mile in length, with their respective homes at either end.

"It's the finest site on the whole lake, though," put in the other girl, "and either the row up, or the ride or drive along its banks, or stroll through the woods, will always hold so many attractions, that we won't mind the little time it takes to get here either way."

"That's very true, Margaret," agreed the older woman, "and I'm perfectly infatuated with the spot. But how is your good mother this morning; and is there any word yet as to when Mr. Manning will arrive?"

"Though very tired of course, Mamma stood the trip much better than I had expected," replied the girl; "and we left her sleeping soundly. Our reason for coming up at such an unearthly hour, was to bring you word that a letter was awaiting us from Will, saying that he was going to be able to leave town sooner than he supposed and would start just one week from the day we left; pushing right on with the fewest possible stops by a short cut which would bring him here not much later than we, probably; so I presume he's due most any time now."

"Well that's good news, surely, for I don't want to put off the house-warming a day longer than is really necessary. Let me see," she meditated, "this is Monday, tomorrow is your mother's Tea for me; how do you think Wednesday evening would do? Beginning with today, that would give two days to get ready in and would be quite enough, I think. Come here, Clayt," she called through the open window; for her

brother-in-law had lingered behind a moment to show his guest a little over the grounds, ostensibly, though in reality to politely request him to drop the subject of the two boathouses, for the present, in answer to immediate inquiries as to the necessity for them.

"What do you think about Wednesday, brother?" she asked, as the young men entered the room.

"What do I think about Wednesday? Why that's all right; best day of all," returned Clayton, glibly; "it's the one I mean to select, same as you and George did. 'Monday for health, Tuesday for wealth, Wednesday the best day of all; Thursday for losses, Friday for crosses, and Saturday no day at all'" he rattled on, laughingly. "Isn't that the way it goes?"

"Stop your nonsense and be serious for just about one minute!" ordered his sister-in-law. "I'm not talking about a wedding, but a house-warming."

"O, that's it, is it?" replied the enlightened young man. "Well, any day that's good enough for a wedding ought to be good enough for a house-warming, it seems to me. I never supposed that the latter was any more serious a subject than the former. Is it? You ought to know."

"No, it isn't; nor half so serious, either, as you'll probably find out some day to your sorrow, young man," retorted Mrs. Nichols. "But now listen; Margaret brings word that Mr. Manning's apt to arrive any hour, so I think it will be safe to plan our affair for Wednesday evening, and we'd better begin today

to get ready; don't want to be in a rush at the last minute you know." This, very emphatically. "Will you call on our friends and invite them, or shall I send John with written invitations? No, that would be much too formal for the country," she decided the next second. "You just drop in and tell them how *deelight*ed we shall be to welcome them to Lakewood Lodge, at ye early candle light, on Wednesday. And don't forget to admire their gardens, Clayt," she charged diplomatically, "and drop a word about *us* not having any this year. I know there isn't any one of them but would be pleased to deluge me with flowers for decorating, only they may not happen to think of it without a gentle reminder; see?" She smiled. "Then tomorrow we can go to the woods for ferns, trailing vines, etc. I've no doubt there's plenty to be had, and the next day—under Gertie's expert supervision" she put in flatteringly—"we'll see how artistic we can make the place look. There's all those lanterns to be hung, too, you know; that will keep Mr. Gardiner and you busy for a while; he has kindly offered to assist. I don't think I'd care to trust the arrangement of them to John."

"Yes," put in the hitherto silent caller alluded to, "I want to be as useful as I am ornamental"; purposefully misquoting. "That's right, isn't it?" as they began to laugh.

"No it isn't," contradicted Margaret Armstrong flatly, "and I never knew before that you were so in-

sufferably conceited, Harold Gardiner. As a matter of fact, you'll have to be a good deal *more* useful than you are ornamental if your help's going to amount to much," she continued teasingly. "There, don't look so distressed," she hastened to admonish, as an involuntary hurt look flitted across the young man's face. "Why that's the greatest compliment I could have paid you, I think. One so seldom hears of an ornamental man being really useful except as an animated clothes rack, and then they're so apt to be vain besides. I wouldn't like you one bit if you were *that*."

"All right, Margaret"; and the young man smiled, evidently thoroughly pacified. "I accept your apology and thank you for the compliment and unintentional pointer." Adding, in an undertone, as they followed the others side by side from the room for an inspection of the new house, "I shall be a perfect Uriah Heap, hereafter, if by that means I may be able to win your regard."

"*Keep* it, you mean, Harry," corrected his companion. "You have it already."

And this simply truthful declaration, which the girl neither intended nor imagined would convey any special significance, unduly magnified in importance by the anxious though unacknowledged lover, was sufficient to strengthen anew in his heart the hope of winning the love he so sorely craved; a hope which had been alternately rising and falling ever since the girl's return home.

Now even from the days of quite early childhood, Harold Gardiner had been buoyantly conscious of an extreme fondness in his heart for Margaret Armstrong; and as he grew to youth and young manhood, had always secretly entertained the sweet hope of ultimately making this girl his wife. During the years in which college life had separated them, he had clung still more tenaciously to and had in truth fed upon this hope, until it had become the dream of his life; the very breath of his longing heart. When they had at last met again during their brief vacations spent at home the previous winter, the long-time fondness had instantly flashed into passionate love. He had then admitted to his mother the secret which, so he learned, she suspected, and who had afterward hinted of him to Margaret's mother as a probable suitor.

An alliance between these two families would have been an altogether agreeable happening upon both sides; for Margaret Armstrong would have been proudly welcomed as a daughter by the Rector and his wife, while Mrs. Armstrong, on the other hand, would have as gladly taken Harold Gardiner to her heart as a loved son, had he been her daughter's choice. For personally the young man was in every way worthy of the worthy girl, and in his chosen profession, medicine, gave promise of one day ranking very high; since at school, at college and at the famed university from which he would take his degree a year later, he

had always been one of, if not the brightest member of his class. But of an unusually strong, self-reliant nature, the girl had always been much given to commanding the subservient youth; while he had appeared more than content, happy, in just the mere privilege of existence as her willing slave.

Human nature—feminine perhaps, especially—is hard to understand. There are girls whose love can be won and only won by just such servile adoration as had always been offered to Margaret Armstrong by Harold Gardiner; but these, we think, are usually girls of weaker nature whose vain pride it gratifies, and whose love, when given, is weak accordingly.

Had this clever young medico been as well versed in the intricate workings of the feminine heart, at this time, as he pre-eminently was in the anatomy of the human body, his wooing might have been carried on along more likely lines. But then, what mere mortal was ever yet able to fathom the why and wherefore of a woman's love?

With jealous eye he had noted the sudden infatuation of Willard Manning, and realized that in him would be found a sure and powerful rival for the affections of the girl; but Mrs. Armstrong's fortunate invitation for the summer with them at the Lake, with the opportunities which he foresaw in it for the pressing of his suit, had made his longing heart to leap for joy; and arriving in Denver the day before her daughter's return, he had immediately sought out the mother

and asked consent to the paying of his addresses. A permission which had been most graciously given, albeit, it is extremely doubtful if the invitation to the Lake for that particular season, would have been extended, had Mrs. Gardiner but have thrown out her hint a trifle sooner.

Willard's detention in Denver, however, seemed a Providential favoring of his aspirations, and the young man would have been scarcely human had he not rejoiced at the occurrence. He determined therefore to make the best possible use of what appeared this Heaven-sent opportunity, and which under slightly differing circumstances might easily have proven such.

Now renewed association with the girl, by deepening, intensifying, and daily adding fuel to the fire of his love, had soon fanned the same into what seemed a veritable consuming flame within him; and to forestall his rival, Harold Gardiner determined to make known his sentiments to their inspirer on the way to the Lake, even at the risk of being thought premature and perhaps even grossly lacking in a nice sense of the fitness of things.

But the subtle vigilance of the mother—quickly detected though utterly incomprehensible to him in view of her cordial reception of his intentions—prevented any favorable opportunity for such a course, thus bitterly disappointing the poor fellow, and making of the journey anything but the blissful two weeks of which he had dreamed.

And now this dreaded rival would soon be in their midst to divide opportunities with him, to say nothing of other possibilities among the numerous other eligibles of the colony, some of them strangers, but numbers of whom, if not formerly as intimate, were at least as old friends of the family; and many, he well knew, would be sure to admire this strikingly beautiful and accomplished returned daughter of the house. The prospect was indeed a gloomy one.

But even as the darkest hours precede the break of day, so a kinder fate seemed now about to lighten the gloom of love's night. As the little party came out upon the veranda again, Margaret announced, "We must be going now."

"Oh, no; stay and lunch with us—*do*," urged their friend; her brother-in-law putting in quickly, "Yes, *do* stay; what's the need of going so soon? Let's put in the morning at croquet; I'm anxious to have a try at the grounds."

"Thanks," returned the thoughtful daughter; "your invitation's awfully kind, tempting and all that, but I really feel as though I ought not to be away all of this first morning, for you know we got here too late last evening to do any unpacking and arranging of the little things, and I want to superintend that, and save Mamma. Then there's the Tea for tomorrow to be arranged for, and as I shall no doubt be wanted to sing, I must do some practicing. We've got that duet to go over a few times, you know"; to Harry. "No,

we really must not stay this morning," she concluded.

"Well, of course if you feel that way about it, Margaret, why we can't insist," said Mrs. Nichols; although we'd dearly love to have you with us. We'll excuse you and Mr. Gardiner, but there's no necessity of *your* going, Gertie," turning to the other. "*Do* stay, dear;" as the girl hesitated. "Clayton will be gone all the afternoon, and I shall be dreadfully lonely all by myself."

There being no valid reason to advance for not accepting this very pressing—and pleasing—invitation, the young girl did so; much, of course, to the delight of her host, who immediately challenged her to a game of croquet.

"You won't stand a ghost of a show, Mr. Nichols," warned her friend, "for Gertie was the champion at Vassar."

"Glad to hear that, Miss Armstrong; I always like to meet 'a foeman'—or woman—'worthy of my steel'," quoted the challenger, laughing. Then added magnanimously, "A fellow always feels sort of mean, you know, winning a game from a lady, anyway, so he'd rather have it a close shave and be beaten. He does hate to simply give a game away, though, for fear of offending."

"The only way you'll offend me, Mr. Nichols, will be by not playing your very best," spoke up Gertrude, quickly. "It must be 'a fair field and no favors,' remember."

"All right, that's a go. What color will you have?" he asked, at once stooping and opening the box, which stood in a corner of the porch.

"Blue, please," replied the girl, sweetly.

"I'll take white, then, so as to have everything in harmony with that pretty suit," ventured the young man, with such an admiring glance at both it and the wearer as caused the deep wild-rose tint in Gertrude's cheeks to instantly take on a much richer hue; and taking the mallets and balls Clayton escorted his fair opponent to the new ground.

Now it will no doubt have been noticed that Harold Gardiner had taken no part in the conversation relative to the termination of their call. Whichever way his companion should have decided it would have been eminently satisfactory to him. But the unlooked-for suggestion that the other remain found an instant echo in his heart, and he waited breathless for her decision; his joy therefore knew no bounds when the invitation was accepted.

"Thank Heaven!" he breathed, with a sigh of relief. "The time has come at last! my first, perhaps my only chance! may Pandora's evils all light upon my unworthy head if I make not the most of it!" And unheeding the chatter going on around him about the proposed game, the young man's mind at once became busy planning a *coup* upon which he felt all his future happiness or unhappiness must depend.

It was a serious moment, as moments upon which

hang momentous consequences always are to thinking men, and he felt it. It is always the unexpected that happens; and although for two weeks he had been endeavoring to find an opportunity for the revealing of his love, one had now been thrust upon him with such suddenness as to be almost disconcerting; but as the girl turned towards the landing he asked quickly: "How would you like to leave the boat, Margaret, and walk home; it will be beautiful along the trail this morning." Adding, craftily, "and we can stop at the spring and get some of those ferns your mother was wishing for yesterday."

"Why, I'd like nothing better," replied the girl, with delightful enthusiasm, unsuspectingly falling into the prepared trap. "I'm so glad you thought of it, Harry. Naturally, I want to see all of this dear old place as quickly as possible; we've had the lake coming up, now let it be the woods, by all means; and Mamma will be so pleased that we thought of her. I shall not fail to tell her where the thanks belong."

"No need of doing that, Margaret, for you know how blessed it is to give," returned her companion. And there was a double meaning to his words as he concluded with: "Besides, I expect to get fully as much pleasure in going for them as they can possibly give to her."

"But are you quite sure you know the way by this 'trail' you mention?" asked their friend, with feigned solicitude. "It would be dreadful for us to have to get out and hunt for babes in the woods."

"Have no fears," laughed Margaret. "The trail's much too well defined for that, and, anyway, it would be next to impossible for me to lose myself anywhere in these woods. Harry knows them about as well, too, I fancy, for he has spent several summers here with us when we were children, and men and boys never forget such things, I think. Have you forgotten, Harry?" she queried.

"No, Margaret, I have forgotten *nothing*," replied the young man briefly. And with a "goodbye; please bring the boat down this evening," to Mrs. Nichols, and a "Come, Harry," much as one might say, "Come, Carlo" to a pet spaniel, and which would have been obeyed with no greater alacrity, the unsuspecting girl turned towards the woods.

Now, a fine road ran along the bank of the Lake, but this was much frequented, and Harold had suggested the trail because of its greater seclusion. From one to two feet in width, it curved around the mountain, now ascending, now descending, through a thick forest of fir and spruce and pine trees, whose lofty tops seemed almost to lose themselves in the deep blue sky overhead; while a patchwork of mosses of differing varieties and shades of coloring ornamented their trunks and the rocks out of which many of them seemed to have sprung. The Summer air was redolent with their rich, resinous fragrance, and a soft carpet of their thickly fallen needles covered the ground. There were no signs of animate life near, but them-

selves, save for a lizzard now and then wriggling across a rock, or an alert, graceful little chipmunk scampering up and down a tree as though playing hide-and-seek with itself. The density of growth, which, save in infrequent patches, largely excluded the sunlight, made it comparatively dark, and the only sounds to be heard were the faint, gentle gurgling of an occasional hidden spring among the rocks, and the crunching and crackling of the dry pine needles and cones beneath their feet. It was still; *very* still.

Amid such surroundings, deep natures, whether old or young, are apt to be still also. The pervasive voice of mighty Nature seems speaking, and their ears are attuned to catch the sound. It is a time, a place, more conducive to thought than speech, and our young friends seemed responsive to the mood of all around them; there was therefore but little attempt at conversation, for they were both thinking.

He, not as we fear many men, possibly the average man, would have done at such a time, as to whether Margaret, should she accept him, would prove all that he expected, and bring into his heart and life the exceeding great happiness for which he hoped; but, *au contraire*, whether *she* would ever be disappointed in *him*, and regret her choice; thus proving the depth, sincerity and worth of his passion.

The result of this self communing created no distrust of himself in the young man; he could not doubt the testimony of his own heart, and to its innermost re-

cesses, its most unfathomable depths, Margaret Armstrong's image reigned supreme over self.

The girl's thoughts had been of love, also, though of a different type—paternal love; for the trail had been a favorite walk of her dear father's, and she was living over again in memory the happy days of childhood, when during the long Summers spent at the Lake there had been scarcely a day in which she had not accompanied him on his rambles; her mother, always delicate, seldom feeling strong enough for the climb. And this trend of thought, bringing with it as it did a fresh realization of their great loss, but added to the softening and subduing influences around her, and she, too, was still.

Arrived at the spring, where the trail for a space widened out into quite a pretentious clearing, having refreshed themselves with the cool, delicious water, and gathered the ferns as planned, they sat themselves down upon a fallen tree to rest; the young man at the same stripping from it a piece of its thick bark, which, with a few deft strokes of his knife, he proceeded to fashion into a heart. Turning the smooth inner surface towards him, Harold then slowly and carefully cut within its centre an artistic M, surrounded by the impressive words, from centre to circumference; after which, again reversing it, and leaning forward with elbows resting on knees and hands extended before him, he sat for some minutes nervously tapping the object with his knife; still silent.

"A penny for your thoughts, Harry; what new microbe are you planning to annihilate now?" at length asked his companion, playfully; for the long and unusual abstinence from conversation between them was beginning to wear upon the girl's nerves.

The tapping instantly ceased, although even then the young man did not answer at once; but after a few seconds, altogether ignoring the joking question, and without looking up, he spoke with great impressiveness and said: "The wealth of the Indies, no, nor the treasures of the universe, could not *buy* my thoughts, Margaret, for they are priceless to me; but I want to *give* them to you *freely*; may I?"

The unusual actions and manner of her companion even more than his strange words, had startled the girl; heart seemed to cease beating and breath to stop for an instant; and as though to escape from some impending danger—she knew not what—she half arose from her seat; but controlling herself, settled back, and answered slowly and hesitatingly: "Why—er—yes—Harry; but I—er don't—know what you mean." Scarcely realizing what she said.

Harold Gardiner's temperament was the *ultra-ardent* one which accompanies bright red hair; and now, suddenly sitting erect and facing the girl, he burst out vehemently: "I mean *this*, Margaret, that I *love* you!.love you with a passion so deep, so strong, so overpowering, that it is eating my very heart out!

Young as we are, for ten long years your sweet image has been enshrined there; it has been the altar at which my devotions have been paid; it has been the happiness, the dream, the hope, the inspiration, the guiding star of my life; beckoning me on to lofty purpose, to high endeavor. I have gone to my tasks in the morning with but one thought: to do, to accomplish something during the day of which you might be proud did you but know of it, and I have fallen asleep at night praying to be made worthy of you. My love for you has been the sunshine of my life, flooding my very *soul* with its radiance!" And with an intense pleading in his voice—to which his vehemence had given way—he concluded: O, tell me, Margaret, that that love is returned!" His eyes, luminous with the fervor of his passion, now peering hungrily into hers, as though to find in them, at least, a reflection of his own.

So great had been the girl's surprise at these impassioned words as to render her for the moment utterly incapable of speech; so with a trace of disappointment in look and voice, though with no less of ardor, the young man continued: "Do you hesitate, Margaret? Can it be that my heart has never yet spoken to yours, this heart where you have so long reigned as queen? Have you forgotten the last time, four years ago, when we drank at this spring together, gathered from these same ferns, sat upon this same tree? Have you forgotten that day, Margaret? Tell

me, have you forgotten that day?" His voice becoming more and more vibrant with repressed emotion as he proceeded.

As her lover ceased speaking a second time, Margaret Armstrong at last found voice to reply; and with an unusual tenderness of manner towards him she said: "No, Harry, I have not forgotten that day, and it will always be a very happy memory in my life; we promised never to forget each other; to be friends as long as life should last."

"Friends, Margaret!" broke in the young man feverishly, as she finished. "I spoke only of friendship at that time because we were both so young; but my love was none the less a fact even then, although less deep than now, and the sweet hope that you might have recognized and secretly responded to it has been the ambrosia upon which my heart has fed during these four years of our separation."

"I shall have to confess, Harry," now replied the girl, again more at ease with him, "that your words have taken me utterly by surprise; probably that is because we have grown up together and you have always seemed so like a brother to me. I feel sure no brother could ever have been kinder or more devoted to a sister than you have been to me, nor have been thought more of in return. But that you *loved* me, Harry, no, I had never detected it; so your heart could never yet have spoken to mine, as you put it."

"But it *will*, Margaret, it *will*!" he exclaimed, im-

petuously. "Love begets love; now that you know how very dear you are to me you *cannot* remain indifferent; such love as mine will *compel* a return."

"Please do not think that I am even now indifferent to you, Harry," replied the girl, warmly. "I cannot tell you in words how much I think of you, how proud I am of you, nor how highly I prize your friendship. I cannot doubt the sincerity and fervor of your sentiment, either, and I am surely flattered by it. Perhaps *romantic* love has not yet awakened in my heart," she ventured. "I love Mamma and Gertie more than myself, I think, but the love that *you* ask, Harry, I do not seem to fully comprehend."

"Thank you for that acknowledgment, Margaret," returned the relieved lover, fervently; "you don't know what a load it has taken from my mind, for I was afraid your affections might already have been centered elsewhere. But since they are not I can afford to wait, for I know that when love *does* waken in your heart you will be aware of it, and that it cannot *help* but be for *me*."

"Does Mamma know of this, Harry?" suddenly asked the young girl.

"Certainly, Margaret; you surely could not think me so lacking as to address you without her permission. I called upon her the day before your return, and was received with all the sweet graciousness of which you know her to be capable. Her permission was given without the least hesitation."

"Our having had so few moments together alone, since, accounts for her not having told me of it, no doubt," returned Margaret. "I know she thinks the world and all of you, Harry, and if you win *my* love you will be sure of *hers* also. But now we must not linger any longer in this sweet spot, which, believe me, Harry, will be doubly dear to me hereafter. Please do not refer to this matter again for the present, though," she requested, gently, "but give me time to become acquainted with myself; and remember, always, that you at least have my very highest regard and esteem."

As the girl concluded, her eye fell upon the heart which had been cut from the bark, but which in his agitation had fallen from the ardent wooer's hand unnoticed. Stooping quickly she picked it up; and as her eye read the moving message which it contained, there was a noticeable catch in the lowered voice as she added: "And this emblem of my sovereignty over your heart will be one of my treasures henceforth."

With a hopeful and therefore happy smile, though as yet unaccepted, the always accommodating lover replied, in answer to her request for further time, "It shall be as you wish, Margaret, and until I have your love I will hold your regard and esteem of first importance." Then quickly possessing himself of his loved one's hand he pressed upon it a passionate and truly worshipful kiss; after which, gathering up the ferns which lay at their feet, he followed her slowly down the trail.

CHAPTER IV.

JACK LINDSAY.

"'This is my Brother Jack, who has been just **dying** to meet you.'"

The Nichols place—which these two had just left—adjoined that of the Lindsays, who, being very close friends of Mrs. Armstrong, had been among the few invited by her to meet Mr. and Mrs. George Nichols while her guests the previous Winter.

Now the Lindsay family consisted of the Doctor, his wife, and their two grown children, Jack and Hattie. Like that of our heroines, the higher education of the latter had been gotten at Vassar; and it having been completed but a year sooner, she and Gertrude Warfield were of course intimately acquainted with each other. Born and bred in the same sphere of life, with the same instincts, ideas, ideals and aims, the two were of thoroughly congenial natures, and as Art had been the specialty of both, this similarity of taste and talent had naturally been an additional bond between them. Margaret and this girl had been playmates in childhood, the intimacy going on uninterruptedly to the present time; and she was looking forward with much pleasure to a share in Gertrude's companionship, now

that the girl was to become a member of the Armstrong household.

Mrs. Lindsay, an artist—amateur—of no mean ability herself, had seen her talent inherited by her children, with extreme gratification; the son, Jack, in fact having chosen Art as his profession. This young man was now at home, enjoying a first vacation after two years of hard study abroad, which had followed a number previously spent in pursuit of the same line under the most competent instruction to be had at home; and brother and sister, devotedly attached to each other, were often to be seen seated by the roadside or perched upon a convenient rock, transferring the beauties and wonders of sky or landscape to sketch-book or canvas.

A young man of nearly twenty-six, Jack Lindsay was as handsome a fellow as one need care to meet; with a delicately-tinted, olive complexion that any girl might have envied him. In fact, their friends had always said that it should by right have belonged to the sister, who was an extremely plain-looking girl, and not at all favored either as to texture or coloring of skin. His wealth of wavy hair was almost black, his eyes very dark blue; of that dreamy, langorous sort which bespeak the artistic temperament. Affable and gentlemanly mannered, deferential almost to tenderness in his address toward women, Jack Lindsay was sure of a warm welcome in society everywhere.

From out the windows of his room—for he had not

yet taken on the early-rising habits indulged in by the rest of the family when at the Lake—the young man had seen the boat containing our girls and Harold Gardiner go by and tie up at the Nichols' wharf; and as he and his sister were breakfasting together,—for the girl would never allow her loved brother to take his meal alone,—he remarked casually, "You've met our new neighbor, Mrs. Nichols, haven't you, Sis?"

"Yes," was the reply; "when she was visiting Mrs. Armstrong last Winter. She's one of the brightest, jolliest little women imaginable, and I'm so glad they've built up at our end of the Lake, for one's sure to have a lively time when she's around, I tell you. But why do you ask, Jack?"

"Because I want you to take me over there when we've finished. Margaret and Harry have just gone up, and your friend, Miss Warfield, I presume it was. *My*, but she's a *picture*! and what a beauty Margaret has grown, too! Why, I'd hardly have recognized her anywhere else."

"But don't tell her so, Jack, for goodness sake!" cautioned his sister, laughingly. "She might think it a doubtful compliment; I mean about the great change in her appearance. She certainly is wonderfully handsome now, but it's only a couple of years since she began to improve, and then it all came so suddenly. I was with her at school at the time, and in a few months you wouldn't have recognized her for the same girl. I think she used to be *almost* as homely as *I* am, so perhaps there's hopes for *me* yet."

"Tut, Sis, you're not homely; I see *millions* of worse-looking girls than you every day, and none that I'd be so proud to call my sister; I wish that I could take you back with me."

"Thanks, Jack," smiled the complimented girl, appreciatively; "and O, how I'd love to go! but of course, Papa'd never consent to such a thing. But what were we talking about? O, yes; Margaret. Well, she's just the same dear, old, charming self that she always was, and you'll like her as much as ever. She sings exquisitely, too. But I don't really think we'd better go over this morning, Jack," she added persuasively. "Mrs. Nichols only got here last evening, you know, and I hardly feel well enough acquainted with her to run in immediately for a morning call."

"O, fudge!" returned the brother; "it'll be all right; everything's informal here; that's the great beauty of the place. You can just say that I saw my old playmates, Margaret and Harry, go by, and as I hadn't seen them for so long couldn't resist the temptation to run over and say 'howdy' to them. You can apologize, and all that, if you think it's necessary. But who is this Miss Warfield?" he concluded carelessly, while replacing his napkin in its ring.

"Why, she's Margaret's chum, Jack," answered Hattie; "the dearest, sweetest little creature, and the most unselfish that ever lived. Everybody loves her; some way she seems to slip right into their hearts at

once. You didn't exaggerate a bit when you called her 'a picture,' either, and she's talented, too, and rich beside, though just as simple and unaffected as if she hadn't a penny to her name. But then she comes of excellent family, which accounts for that. She was the only child of the late Judge and Mrs. Warfield, of Omaha; her father was one of the most noted lawyers of the West, you know. He died soon after she came to college, and she lost her mother—a Southerner—when she was born, poor girl. She and Margaret are like sisters to each other, and as she's alone in the world, she's going to make her home with the Armstrongs hereafter. I shall enjoy her companionship immensely, particularly as our talents lie in the same direction. Gertie did some very good work even while I was at school with her, and has no doubt vastly improved since then; I want you to see some of it. I mean to have her spend at least a week here with us before we go down."

Now this seemingly extravagant eulogy of her friend by his sister had not fallen upon deaf ears, by any means, although the young man made no comments; but as she finished, he pushed back his chair and asked—as though their making the proposed call were a foregone conclusion,—“Well, how soon shall we start, Sis?”

“O, Jack, I know Mamma won't at all approve of our being quite so premature,” protested the girl. “But if you're really *determined* to go,” she finally ac-

quiesced, "why, we'd better get away before she comes."

"All right; let's vamoose, then, for I hear wheels," returned her brother; jumping hastily up and making for the hall.

"Sure they're not in your head, Jack?" joked his sister, stopping, however, and assuming a listening attitude as she spoke.

"Not by a jugful! There, what do you call that?" her companion queried, as a distinctly grating sound fell upon their ears from the graveled road. "Here, skip!" said he, thrusting upon her the parasol, which with one hand he had taken from the rack, while with the other he grabbed his own Panama. And making their exit through a side door, the two rounded the rear corner of the house much after the manner of a couple of guilty little children, just as the parents, returning from a regular morning constitutional, drove up to the carriage block in front.

Now, having returned to the house for a chat upon paper with her absent husband immediately after the departure of Margaret Armstrong and her rejoicing lover, Mrs. Nichols was in the act of crossing the spacious hall to her own apartments for that purpose, just as the runaways—who had crossed the few rods of lawn separating their respective homes in almost less time than it would take to record the fact—stepped upon the veranda. Staying her steps for an instant to see who the newcomers might be, she at once recog-

nized the girl; and in her whole-hearted way hastened to the door to greet them.

"Why, Miss Lindsay! how *delighted* I am to see you! come in, come in!" shaking hands with both—as the girl presented her brother—in that hearty school-boy fashion peculiarly her own, which charmed Jack Lindsay, and at once established a feeling of *comaraderie* between the two.

"I feel that we owe you a thousand apologies, Mrs. Nichols," said Hattie, as they followed the lady into the living room.

"What for, pray?" was the surprised inquiry.

"Why, for calling so soon, for one thing, and so early in the day besides. But we're simply a pair of runaways; Mamma never would have let us be *quite* so informal if she'd been at home. Jack just insisted on coming, however, and as he's company, why, I had to humor him. He's grown such a Bohemian since he's been away from home that there's no keeping him to the proprieties any more, at all," replied the girl, with a reproving look at her insistent brother.

"I plead guilty to the charge," confessed the young man, with mock contrition, "and can only hope for our friend's indulgence; which, somehow, I feel quite certain will be granted. But honestly," he continued, "that's the great charm about Bohemia—its lack of conventionality, which at least possesses the saving grace of keeping its denizens from becoming a mere menagerie of parrots and apes."

"You're a man after my own heart exactly, Mr. Lindsay; shake!" returned their young hostess, with great animation, extending her hand, heartily,—they were seated very near each other,—“and I hope my neighbors will have no greater drain upon their indulgence in respect to me before the season's over than I feel you to have been upon mine this morning. I'm almost sure to do something unconventional. Social etiquette—much of it, at least—is so awfully tiresome to me; simply bores me to death. I think it makes us such a lot of hypocrites, and utterly uninteresting, by robbing us of our individuality. Why when every one lives by rote you know just what to expect all the time, and so lose your interest in them. I like people's actions to be an expression of themselves; not as though we were all cut out by the same pattern,” she went on, with much vigor, “from the same piece of calico; I like the vim, the spice of life that comes from variety.”

“Still,” asked the practical Hattie, “would we really want every one we come in contact with to feel free to say and do everything they thought of or wished to? Mamma says that the fixed rules of society keep much selfishness in check.”

“Of course, there's two sides to the question,” assented their hostess, graciously, “and as we've got to bow to its dictates, whether or no, why we might as well swallow our objections with a good grace, I suppose, as to be compelled to *gulp* them down like our

Spring doses in childhood. I shall never forget the scenes," she laughed, reminiscently, "that would always follow Mamma's leading me to the lavatory in the nursery, with her cupful, *never less*, of the nauseating stuff. I can hear her yet, as plainly as though it were but yesterday, after the most patient coaxing, bribing and threatening by turns, finally declare, 'Now, Alice, there's no use making any more fuss; it's *got* to go down; here, let me hold your nose!' and with a terrific sputtering and gagging, all that I had not succeeded in pouring down the drain while her unsuspecting back was turned, would at last be forced down my unwilling throat. But how is your good mother, and the Doctor, your father? We did *so* enjoy meeting them last Winter."

"Both very well, indeed, thank you, Mrs. Nichols," replied the son; adding gallantly, "and looking forward with much pleasure, I assure you, to having such a desirable and charming neighbor."

"Very lovely, indeed, Mr. Lindsay,"—the lady smiled in appreciation of the neatly turned compliment—"and I hope their pleasure may be only second to my own in receiving them here, as I hope to have the great pleasure of first doing on Wednesday evening; though one drawback to my happiness and thorough enjoyment of the occasion will be my husband's absence; that he is not here to do the honors and share the pleasure with me. Mr. Manning, whom we are waiting for, is expected by that time; the girls have been up to tell us so already this morning."

"Yes," put in Hattie, "Jack saw them pass." But, checked by her knowledge and observance of 'social etiquette,' she refrained from adding that their uncere-monious call was altogether due to that fact, and not to an excessive neighborliness upon their part, as their hostess evidently found much pleasure in supposing.

"I tried to keep them for luncheon," Mrs. Nichols resumed, "but Margaret feared her mother would over-do if she stayed, so she and Mr. Gardiner left just a little before you came."

"Why, I didn't notice any one on the lake," said the girl. "Did you, Jack?"

"O, they walked back," volunteered the other, without waiting for the young man to reply; "went by the trail, if you know where that is. But Miss Warfield's still here; you're acquainted with her, aren't you?"

"Well, rather," replied Hattie, smiling. "That is, I am. We were at school together for three years, so I know well just what a *darling* Gertie is, and I'm very anxious, of course, to have my brother meet her."

"Shall we join them, then?" asked Mrs. Nichols. "She and my brother-in-law are having a game around on the lawn."

Now, it was for just some such turn in the conversation that Jack Lindsay had been most devoutly wishing ever since their arrival. Rising at once, he put in heartily, "By all means, Mrs. Nichols; and it's shamefully thoughtless of us to have kept you indoors this lovely morning. I do hope you'll pardon us."

"O, don't worry about that, Mr. Lindsay," was the comforting reply, as they left the house in compliance with his action. "I meant to stay in," she continued, with her usual frankness, "and devote the morning to Georgie"—Mr. Nichols, she paused to explain,—“so you haven't kept me in at all.”

"Well, then, we owe the apology to Mr. Nichols for having kept you from *him*; is that it?" asked the young man, laughing.

"To no one; I have all the afternoon for writing, and wouldn't have missed your call this morning for anything," returned their hostess, with great cordiality.

"I suppose it's billiards gone to grass, that we're to see," ventured Jack, as they walked along.

"Yes, but not to seed," was the quick rejoinder. "I thing it's far too popular a game for that, ever, don't you? I hope you'll both come over and play with us very often."

"Thanks; we will," replied the sister, heartily. We're both fond of it, and I'd be much more so, even, if I could ever get to putting up a half-way decent game. "O, Gertie dear!" she burst out—they had by this time reached the croquet field—"I'm *awfully* glad to see you once more;"—rushing forward and half smothering her friend with kisses, in the true school-girl fashion which she had not yet outgrown. "This is my brother, Jack, who has been just *dying* to meet you;"—with a mischievous look in his direction, for she had read him like a book—"Miss Warfield, Jack."

Now, in any one possessed of far less claim to beauty than his sister's attractive young friend, Jack Lindsay's artistic eye, trained to discover even hidden perfections, might probably have found much to admire. But if, in the hasty glimpse which he had obtained of her in the passing boat a few hours earlier, Gertrude had seemed to him '*a picture*,' the vision of extreme loveliness which he now beheld at close range for the first time, *bewildered, dazzled* him. He felt his sister's description to have been wholly inadequate; a most feeble portrayal of such myriad charms. The girl was at once a dream; a poem; the light, the fragrance, the softness of the hour. So fresh and fair, she seemed to him the very epitome of a Spring morning; full of all the gentle charm and promise of sweet, young life. So enamored was he,—for 'whoever loved that loved not at first sight'—that his usual *sang froid* entirely forsook him; and it was with a very evident show of embarrassment, both to the surprise and amusement of his sister, that he bent over the proffered hand and murmured his acknowledgments of the introduction. He had come, and seen, and he was—conquered.

CHAPTER V.

A MORNING GAME.

"'Well, 'twas a glorious victory!' declared Jack coming quickly up the field to shake hands with his opponents."

From long acquaintance with his brother's devoted wife, Clayton Nichols understood perfectly what a weighty, lengthy matter a letter to Georgie always was; why, her postscripts alone would fill volumes,—he was wont to declare, teasingly—even under ordinary circumstances; and now, with so much interesting data incident to the trip, the place, *et cetera*, to give him, there was no telling *when* the precious epistle would be finished. "Certainly not before lunch time," he congratulated himself, gleefully, as their fair, young guest accepted the invitation to remain; and his heart reveled in the prospect of a whole morning of companionship alone with this sweet girl, hourly becoming more dear to him. His feelings, therefore, would perhaps be better imagined than described when the trio before referred to made their advent upon the scene. Not to mince matters, the intrusion upon their *tete-a-tete* could not possibly have been more disagreeable and unwelcome to the young man than it was. But the 'fixed rules of society,'—which, according to

one's opinion, as we remember, makes us such a lot of hypocrites, to another's keeps much selfishness in check—required a gracious reception of his sister-in-law's guests; and his manner was therefore the quintessence of cordiality as he came forward to greet them.

There was no need of further introductions, for the rest of the party had all met before; so after the usual handshakings, 'so pleased,' *et cetera*, had been indulged in, Jack, whose equilibrium was by now quite restored, expressed the polite hope that they were not interrupting the game.

"O, not at all!" replied their host. "We had just finished a sort of practice game, and to dedicate the ground, which, by the way, isn't half bad. Join us, won't you? I feel sure Miss Warfield will be as pleased to have you do so as myself;"—which latter assertion, truthfully interpreted, would have read, not at all.

"I shall be simply delighted," put in the young girl warmly. "It will seem like old times to have a game with you again, Hattie."

"But I haven't improved one bit, Gertie," returned her friend, modestly hesitating to accept, "and I'm afraid I'll only spoil the game for the rest."

"O, no you won't; you'll have Mr. Nichols for a partner, and he's such a *magnificent* player, that he'll carry you right along to victory."

"Well, I'm sure you're both awfully kind," returned

the girl. "Shall we play, Jack?" now turning to her brother for approval; who, though apparently absorbed for the moment in the nice things he was saying to Mrs. Nichols about her house and its surroundings, had lost not a word of the conversation between the others, and had moreover been elevated to the seventh heaven by Gertrude's implied selection of himself as a partner for the proposed game; even daring to indulge the ungrounded hope that the wish might have suggested the thought.

"Don't *think* of refusing, Sis!" was the emphatic answer. "Such tempting invitations are far too much like angel's visits for that." Then, with an opportune recollection of the requirements of good breeding, he offered quickly, "But won't *you* take my place, Mrs. Nichols?"

"O, no; take mine, please," put in his sister, generously. "It will be so much more interesting a game if you will, I know."

"Neither, thanks," refused their hostess, politely, but with a decisiveness which brooked of no further urging, and a silencing nod to Gertrude, who was beginning in the same strain. "Now that I have you all off my hands," she added, jokingly, "I shall try to carry out my good intentions of the morning. There's a certain road paved with such, you know, but *I* aim to furnish as few of the cobbles as possible. Ta-ta; enjoy yourselves!" finished the hospitable little woman, graciously, as she turned and tripped gaily back to the house.

A convenient hammock had already tempted Miss Lindsay to a moment's loll; and as their host excused himself and returned to the porch for the additional paraphernalia needed, Jack, in his most fascinating, courtly way, motioned his sister's friend to a near-by settee, saying, "Do rest a moment, Miss Warfield;" and blessing his lucky stars for so favoring an opportunity, with a deferential, "may I be permitted?" took his place beside the girl, and opened the conversation by remarking that he was pleased to learn of her interest in Art. "Sister and I spend a good deal of time with Nature," said he, "and I hope you will favor us with your company on many of our rambles; there's no lack of subjects around here."

"And *exquisite* ones, too!" added the girl, her beautiful face lit with enthusiasm at once, for this was a favorite topic. "It's the most *entrancing* spot I ever was in, without a single exception; and the trip up was the treat of a lifetime. I have quite a portfolio of sketches already," she informed him, "and I think the crowning one was the sunrise of this morning; it was *perfectly grand!* Thanks for your kind invitation, Mr. Lindsay; I shall certainly be most happy to accept."

"You don't mean to tell me that you're such an early riser as all that, Miss Warfield?" ejaculated her companion, in feigned horror.

"O, it's not habitual, I assure you," laughed the girl,

"and I shall probably not be so ambitious again all Summer ; but I *did* want to do the very first one, don't you know."

Much to Jack Lindsay's regret, of course, the conversation was here cut short by the return of their host, and taking their mallets and balls the players at once lined up for the knock-off, which, to the surprise of all, gave to Miss Lindsay the opening play.

"O, don't make me go first," pleaded the girl, in unfeigned distress. "I need some balls to play on. Gertie, dear, won't you take my place? You don't need any help."

"All right," assented the other, in her usual bright, cheery, obliging way ; adding, "I'm willing, if the gentlemen are. Or would it be better, perhaps, to have your brother begin?" she questioned. "That will keep the colors in stake rotation, you see, and give you the very *last* play, with a chance at us all."

"That suits *me* to a T. Jack, will you commence, please?"

"*Avec beaucoup de plaisir, Mademoiselle,*" returned the brother, Frenchily, with an appropriately Alphonsonian bow ; and at once placing his ball in position, sent it neatly through the first two arches.

Taking advantage of the extra stroke to which this feat entitled him—for the rules governing the game at that time were more liberal in some respects than those adopted later—with the first, the young man succeeded in placing himself in such position before

the side arch, that with the second, the ball was sent through and into position for the cage in the center. "Well done, Mr. Lindsay!" exclaimed Gertie, with the evident pride and satisfaction felt in a proficient partner; adding, with confidence, "and you'll clear *that* all right, *too*"; while Hattie, whose pride in her brother's skill caused her for the moment almost to lose sight of the fact that he was an opponent, cried out: "Good for you, Jack!"

"Ever going to stop?" drawled out Clayton, languidly, as he dropped down beside his waiting ball, in feigned weariness. "Let me know when my turn comes; I'll take a little nap in the meantime."

"O, you won't have long to wait; not time for more than forty winks;" laughed the successful player. "I'll just get into position for that other wicket, with your permission—as he cleared the cage by a scratch—and then wait for company; it's getting a trifle lonesome down here." And with a final, light stroke, he had left his ball in readiness for its next using, but a few inches back of side arch number two to the right.

"Wake up, old man; it's your turn now," he then called. At which the other arose, glanced considerably at the position of his opponent for a moment, placed his ball, and with a swinging stroke cleared the two arches as the first player had done before him, and in addition, sent it spinning down the field, to stop in an almost straight line with the other's and scarcely six feet away. Two successive plays were now his,

but one of which was needed to strike the little red ball lying so temptingly and promisingly behind the enemy's arch. "Shall I roquet or croquet, Miss Lindsay?" he asked.

"O, don't ask me, Mr. Nichols, for goodness sake!" replied his partner, helplessly. "I'm very sure you know a whole lot better than I what to do; only" she cautioned wisely—"don't leave him there for Gertie to play on; she comes next, you know."

"Well, I'll roquet then," said the man, "so as to get the most good out of my strokes." And placing his own ball at the left and a thought ahead of Jack Lindsay's, one clever stroke sent him into position for the arch, with his opponent in close range for use after it should have been made. Coming through and striking the little red again, he bowled it along with his own for a ways as he aimed for position, went through the cage, struck it again, and almost unexpectedly to himself even, he, in turn, now rolled to a *possible* position before side arch number two.

"O, do you *really* think you can make it, Mr. Nichols?" inquired his partner, excitedly; as she scanned the difficult situation with apprehension. "Good! good! he's done it!" she cried with joy a moment later; as the ball rolled through the doubtful wicket sideways, all but grazing it; stopping less than two inches on the other side.

"Now do put Jack out of the way," she urged. "Don't leave him there for Gertie; she'll come right

down and put him into position again; see if she doesn't." But the left of the wicket was between the specified balls, and the most that her partner's remaining play could accomplish was to gain a position before the lower center arches; thus leaving both his own ball and the little red, good targets for the next player, Gertrude.

With but little apparent effort, the girl took the first arches, skimmed down the field and made her partner's ball, all with one stroke. Next, calculating to a nicety the distance and slant to *his* next arch with her eye, she stooped, and holding their balls firmly together, hammered them yet more close with a few smart raps of her mallet; then rising and pressing steadily upon her own with her slender foot, struck the ball a quick, hard, well-directed blow; croqueting her partner not only into position—as her sanguine friend had prophesied—but clear through his arch. Turning, the girl now made a play for their opponent's ball; hit it, croqueted it *off* the field, to the left, and with an exceptionally successful stroke, even for her, finished the play by driving her own ball back up the field; following quickly to take her place beside it as it came to a standstill squarely in position, some four feet back of its own arch.

"Brava!"

"Capital!"

"Fine!" chorused the others; Hattie Lindsay adding, "at your old tricks still, I see"; as she took her place to begin.

Clayton Nichols had by this time recovered and placed his ball again upon the field; and as his partner raised her mallet to strike, he called out quickly, "Make the two arches, Miss Lindsay, and use your strokes to come down here by me; I want your ball to use; besides, it wont do much good for you to loiter around that neighborhood while Miss Warfield's there."

Lowering her mallet, the girl burst into a hearty laugh, as she replied, "Well, it's very evident you've never played croquet with *me* before, Mr. Nichols. Why, I was never known to make two arches at once, was I Jack? In fact, I'm not real sure that I ever got through one even, on the first try. I'll do my very best, though," she finished, seriously.

But although the ball sat squarely in the center and her aim seemed true, the mallet somehow swerved as she landed a ringing blow; and the ball, striking the wicket, bounced back with a thud against the stake.

"*Booby*, as usual!" she exclaimed with vexation and disgust. "Oh, you can't count on any help from me, Mr. Nichols; I just knew I'd spoil the game."

As the unmistakable quiver in the mortified girl's voice smote on her ear, Gertie stepped quickly to her side, and slipping an arm tenderly about her waist for a moment, whispered soothingly, "Don't mind, dear; you'll make them both next time." Then turning to Clayton, who at that moment came hastening after his ball as it bounded up the field and rolled over beside her own, just touching it, she demanded, "What

are you doing up this way, sir? You belong down at the other end."

"O, I just want to be in good company for a little," replied the young man; continuing, "that blue ball looks very tempting; what shall I do with it, Miss Lindsay?" For he had been struck by Gertie's sweet act of sympathy, and wished to do his part also, toward lessening his partner's chagrin at failure, by again deferring to her opinion.

"Take it along and use it since you can't have mine," pouted the girl, gloomily. Then brightening: "But no; she'll be right down by Jack again if you do that, won't she? Why treat her as she did you; put her off the field," she laughed.

"Well, if I must, here goes!" returned her well instructed partner. And Gertie's ball now went spinning out beyond the limits; while turning to its owner he asked half-apologetically—as though really regretting the necessity for the damaging play,—“No favors; wasn't that the agreement?”

"No apologies necessary, Mr. Nichols," replied Gertie; "friendship has ceased for the time being, you know; it's war to the death!" And as she hurried across the field to hunt her ball, the girl called back with a playful threatening, "I'll do as much for you again the first chance I get; see if I don't."

True—or shall we say *due* to Gertie's inspiring prediction, for 'kind words never die'—with Hattie Lindsay's next play, the opening arches *were* cleared;

and once on the field the girl's execution was not always as poor as the beginning had threatened.

The game was now well on, and with the one exception of herself, might justly have been termed a battle of giants; while even *her* lack of skill was almost more than offset by the extraordinary ability of her partner; of whom her friend had but truthfully said, that he played a magnificent game.

Up and down and across the field raced the combatants, chasing and hammering each other, asking and showing no quarter; while frequent shouts of,

"Crack shot!"

"Touched!"

"Flinched!"

"Put her out!"

"Good! good!"

"Didn't move six inches!"

"Dead ball!"

"Too far in!" and other pertinent exclamations, commendatory, condemnatory or advisory, as the situation at hand evoked, gave evidence of the excitement under which the players were now laboring.

Having won the honor of first rover, Gertie, with her little blue ball, wrought much havoc in the enemy's camp for a time; but an unexpectedly lucky stroke of her friend's, suddenly drove her against the stake, and out; thus ending her destructively useful career, and leaving her sorry partner to carry on the unequal contest alone.

Slowly up the field continued the remaining players, now one, now another making some trifling advance; but not a position was gained nor an arch cleared, without at least, a scrimmage, and oftener a hard fought battle; until for the little red—Jack Lindsay's—there remained but the final center arches and the home stake; with the sister's black, only one point behind, in position at the last arch to the left.

And now, aimed straight for the latter, came Clayton's white rover, struck with *terrific* force, bounding up the field from the extreme lower righthand corner, to which the other man had driven it but an instant before. Breathless, the players watched its rapid, unswerving course past arches and cage, until its stinging blow sent the intended ball well through the desired arch; the impact causing it to fly clear over and spend what of its strength yet remained, losing itself beyond the limits.

"Whew, Nichols, but that was a stunner!" burst out Jack. "I had no idea you could make it!"

"*Splendid!*" exclaimed Gertie; beaming with ill-concealed pride in the young man's achievement, and a pleasure that could only have been equalled by the natural additional satisfaction felt had he been playing upon her side.

"It *was* a pretty lucky shot," admitted Clayton, modestly; adding dubiously, "but we're not out of the woods yet by any means. Now make your brother's

ball, Miss Lindsay"—as his partner began to play—"and the two shots will put you in position and take you through the arch. You can do it!" he added encouragingly, as the girl, now fairly trembling with nervous excitement, hesitated to attempt the eight or ten feet of space which lay between them. "Now; strike hard!" he finished.

But once more, her mallet swerved; and the blow, which should have struck the very middle of the ball for the accomplishment of her partner's wish, feebly hit the side; rolling it along for a couple of feet, to settle most aggravatingly back again, fully half the distance.

If the reader—as we hope—still has in mind our early introduction, he will recall that Clayton Nichols' nature was a very earnest one. While no one could be a more graceful loser than himself, yet even in so simple a matter as a game like this, where there was really nothing at stake, he played to win. It was therefore only by a mighty effort that he politely repressed a groan, as the main force of his partner's blow was expended upon the underlying ground; but his feelings found partial vent in an uncontrollable, doleful, "Well, I guess the jig's up, Lindsay"; followed by a quick apology to the ladies for his inadvertent lapse into slang.

"O, the game's not ours yet by a good deal," returned the other; "there's surely not much to envy in our position."

And this assertion was only too true; for Jack Lindsay's ball lay so far to the right and so little back of the arch, that to clear it would require little short of a miracle. For a moment the young man studied the situation. To merely secure a better position at this stage, as he could have done, would be useless, for the white rover would have no difficulty in dislodging him at the next play. There was no alternative; the arch must be made if possible, attempted at least. It was a ticklish play; too hard a stroke would be sure to send the ball either beyond, or against the wire; so with a very cautious one, Jack sent it rolling gently along. But the blow had lacked just a *fraction of* sufficiency, and the little red came to a most exasperating halt underneath the arch.

"O, it *must* be through!" exclaimed Gertie—who, though out of the game and debarred from giving advice, still retained her mallet—and dropping excitedly to her knees the girl carefully spanned the back of the wicket with its handle; but alas! the ball was just grazed, and she arose with a deep sigh of disappointment; exclaiming, "We're lost for *sure*, Mr. Lindsay!"

"That's what you are, Miss Warfield," broke in Clayton, laughingly, as with the white rover he at once struck the little red, and croquetting it clear off the field, turned, aimed for and hit his partner's ball.

The hardly contested game was now practically over, for with one stroke, the young man then placed

this latter in absolutely certain position back of its arch, while with the other he rolled his own ball in front of it for his partner's benefit; and as though to make amends for her several bad breaks during the game, the girl now covered herself with glory at the last; for clearing the two arches at one play—her ball sending that of her partner before it through the last—she succeeded in driving them both home to the stake before another play to him gave Jack Lindsay a fighting chance to re-enter the contest.

"Well 'twas a glorious victory!" declared he, coming quickly up the field to shake hands with his opponents"; and I sincerely congratulate you both; although heartily ashamed of myself for not having saved the day for Miss Warfield at last."

"Please don't feel badly about that, Mr. Lindsay"; said Gertie, sweetly; "*I* certainly don't. With such opposition and the odds against you as they were for so long, *no* one could possibly have reflected more glory upon our side than you did, and then we shall have many opportunities to redeem ourselves, I hope."

"The credit belongs all to your good sister," put in Mr. Nichols generously; "if she had not put your wonderful partner out of the game so early, we could never have beaten you. Why it isn't possible we've been playing all that time!" he concluded in surprise; looking at his watch, as the bell rang for luncheon. "Stay and have a bite with us, won't you?"

"O, no, thanks!" declined Miss Lindsay, with de-

ciding emphasis; "we must get home and make our peace with Mamma. We can't thank you enough though, for this delightful morning. *Au revoir*," waved the retreating girl, calling back as she went: "We'll be down to see those sketches this evening, Gertie."

CHAPTER VI.

GERTRUDE WARFIELD.

"She inspired love as naturally as the thirsting Earth draws to itself showers of refreshment from the moisture-laden clouds."

Where first impressions are lasting they are but confirmed, strengthened and deepened by further acquaintance. Certainly Jack Lindsay's wildly flattering ones at his first glimpse of Gertrude Warfield, were in nowise lessened by the morning's association on the croquet field with the charming girl; while the evening call—so thoughtfully arranged for his especial benefit by the considerate sister—tended but to the further deepening of his already mad infatuation. One thing, however, troubled him—for it is not given to mortals to know the *joy of unalloyed bliss*. They had accepted Mrs. Nichols' neighborly invitation to return home with herself and brother-in-law, in the 'Alice,' having preferred walking to the Armstrong cottage to using their own boat, and in all the conversation regarding the new arrival—which we may reasonably conclude was not a little—Mrs. Nichols, so it seemed to him, had aimed to create the impression, true or false, that they were on terms of exceeding great intimacy with her. Could it be that there was any-

thing between the girl and Clayton, he wondered. "It would be the most natural thing in the world, of course," so he told himself; "for what living man could even once meet her and *not* lose both head and heart." At the dread thought of such a possibility, cold, creepy shivers immediately began worming their way up and down his spine. He promised himself to ask Sis, as soon as they should reach home; she was perhaps posted on the subject, and he must know at once. Thus did he bridle his impatience for the moment.

But the evening at Mrs. Armstrong's had naturally been such a delightful one that it had been found hard to leave; it was therefore nearing the 'wee sma' hours when home was reached; and suffering from a severe headache, his sister had immediately retired, leaving him to the unsatisfactory companionship of his doubts and fears. There was nothing to be done therefore, but wait—with such scant patience as he could now muster—until their particular hour for confidential confabs, breakfast time; so getting into a jacket and slippers, Jack Lindsay settled down in his favorite reclining chair by the open window, for a solacing pipeful ere following her example. As he smoked, and the cobwebs which had been fastening themselves upon his mind gradually loosened and floated away, doubts and fears going with them gave place to an exhaustive review of the sweet day just closed; the happiest, and as he felt it also to be, the most eventful in his whole life; for in it *love*, deep and virile, had at last sprung

into existence within him. "Surely it will be returned," was his confident thought; "and under the inspiration of *such* a love, what would there be that he dared not undertake; what was there that he could not accomplish? O, how hard he would work! he would make a name for himself, for *her*—*precious* thought! But he must have her with him; the drudgery of Art would be no longer drudgery with her dear companionship to brighten the leisure hours. Yes, he must manage in some way to take her and Sis back with him. Separation? Impossible! The mere *thought* was a *dagger* thrust! True, he was not in a position to marry at once, but they were both young enough to wait, and that happiest day could well be postponed awhile. The balance of his stay at home now, he felt, would be all too short for anything but the cultivating of a deep friendship—that firm root of love's beautiful plant. But in Paris, *dear, witching, amorous Paris*, where every breath inhaled was charged and surcharged with love and romance, *there* he would woo and win this lovely being, from whose glorious eyes the very *stars* at which he gazed *must* have borrowed their brilliancy, and the *moonbeams* their soft effulgence." His was no *mild* case, it will be observed; he had been deeply inoculated and it had taken most thoroughly.

The young man's unusually early appearance for breakfast next morning was inexplicable to his sister, until, the last course having been served and the maid

dismissed, he quickly relieved both hers and his own mind, by commencing, "Where did Miss Warfield meet the Nichols family, Sis, and have they been long acquainted?"

Ah! the cat was out of the bag at last! It had been *this* then, upon his mind, and not the rarebit of the evening before upon his stomach—as she had feared—which had curtailed her dear brother's sleep. "Much less serious," was the girl's amused thought, as she replied: "Why, they met at some watering place or other several Summers ago, and the families—she was always with the Armstrongs, you know—have been very intimate ever since. Mr. George Nichols had been an acquaintance of Margaret's father in his lifetime, I believe. I remember hearing the girls talk about what a grand time they had had that vacation, after we all got back to school again, and Margaret has teased Gertie about Clayton, more or less ever since; but I hardly believe there's anything in it. What do you think of her, Jack?"

"Sis," came the quick reply, "she's the most *exquisitely beautiful*, the most *charming*, the most *fascinating*, positively the most *irresistible* girl I ever met. She's slipped right into *my* heart just as you say she does into everybody's. In fact, Sis, I'm in *love*, *desperately* in love, and I want you to help me."

"What! again, Jack?" exclaimed his sister in unconcealed surprise. For she remembered that when growing up, her brother had been known as one of

those ultra-susceptible chaps whose spare time seemed all to be taken up falling either in, or out of love; it had been a standing joke in the family. Probably no other youth in Denver at the time could have boasted a larger collection of tiny, daintily perfumed handkerchiefs and odd party gloves, little faded flowers, etc., than he; so she continued teasingly, "How about Belle, and Marion, and Stella, and—"

"*Calf* loves, all of them; over and forgotten long ago!" broke in her brother, with marked displeasure both in tone and manner, "and I shouldn't think you'd be so mean as to mention them in a connection like this, Hattie. The trouble is you don't seem to realize that I'm grown up; a fellow's folks never do," he finished, disgustedly.

Now Jack Lindsay only called his sister by her full and given name when he *was displeased*. Sis was his pet name for her, and the girl therefore hastened to mollify him; for she had not the least wish or intention of wounding his feelings, which she now saw were really serious.

"Forgive me, Jack," she begged sweetly; reaching over and offering him her hand. You know I was only joking, don't you? and wouldn't hurt you for anything. What is there that I can do for you?"

"I'm the one to apologize," humbly returned the young man, as they clasped hands; his good humor now fully restored by her soft answer. "But it's as I told you, Sis, and the jealous fear that there might be

at least an understanding between her and Clayton Nichols, has put me out of sorts, I guess, and made me a little touchy this morning. I am no longer a boy, sister," he went on very earnestly, after a moment's thoughtful pause. "Man's most blessed-heritage, the instinct of home and family, of late stirs within me, but until today I have met no one whom I could wish to have share that happy state with me. Your sweet friend meets all the requirements of my heart in this respect, therefore I love her, and loving her wish, yes *long* to have her for my wife. Of course, I should not marry for a while, for which reason, also because my time here will now be so short, I would rather not tell her of this at present; but if she and you could return with me, I should have no fears whatever about being able to win her love. Does she intend pursuing her art studies any further?"

"I really don't know, Jack, but with her talent it would be a great shame if she didn't, I think."

"It certainly would, Sis, so I want you to find out what her ideas on the subject are, and convert her to yours if necessary."

"But there's almost no reason to hope for *my* going over with you, Jack; we might bring Mamma around, but Papa, I'm afraid, *never*."

"Never's a long day, Sis," returned the young man, "and our father is not an easy man to convince against his will, I admit; however, it shall not be for lack of persuasive eloquence upon my part if I don't bring

him, too, around to my way of thinking yet. I can trust you with my secret?" he asked, anxiously, as they arose to separate; "and count upon your help?"

"Sure, Jack," replied the devoted sister, with a heartiness which assured her prompt and best efforts being put forth for the furthering of her brother's interests. Nor was the confidence which her words inspired misplaced; for her campaign of missionary work was inaugurated that very afternoon at Mrs. Armstrong's Tea.

"You've made wonderful progress in your work the last year, Gertie," she remarked politically to her friend; as they two found themselves separated for a moment from the rest of the company. "Those sketches coming up are very fine. Jack says they show great talent. You're not going to stop your studies now, I hope."

"O, no indeed!" was the gratifying reply; "I'm much too fond of them for that. When we get back to the city I intend to put myself under competent instruction again. Who do you take from?"

"Nobody but Mamma of late, and then of course brother's been a great help to me for the last few months. But he goes back to Paris soon, you know. We're trying to persuade Papa to let me go with him; and I'm just *dying* to. O, Gertie, I wish you'd go with us!" she added impetuously, as though the thought had but then first entered her mind. "What *glorious* times you and I could have over there together!"

"I've long had an ambition to study in that artistic atmosphere and probably shall, some day," returned her friend; continuing politely, "and it would be perfectly lovely to be there with you, Hattie, too; but I couldn't go this Fall, for Aunt Nellie brings Margaret and me out in October, you know, and we may leave for Europe soon after that so as to give her the whole Winter in the South of France. I do hope *you* decide to go though, for it would be the most delightful anticipation to look forward to seeing you in Paris when we get there. I *might* decide to stay with you for a year or two of study after our tour's finished; who knows? I really have no plans for the future though beyond that, as yet"; concluded the girl.

Now while his sister's report of this interview was altogether void of promise for the immediate future, it nevertheless was not without encouragement for Jack Lindsay, and was responsible for the unusually forceful plea made to his father over their after-dinner coffee and cigars that evening; which plea, though also seemingly barren of results, was far from disheartening to the persevering young man, since an easy victory in this case was beyond expectation.

Now Dr. Hiram Lindsay was a self-made man and so successful a physician that he might be justly proud of his job. He was intensely practical, and quite set in his opinions. While he did not in the least disparage the artistic abilities of his wife but was in fact very

proud of these, yet as a profession for a man, Art came extremely near to inspiring his contempt, for he regarded the occupation as altogether too effeminate a calling for the sterner sex; it being always associated in his mind with a luxuriously appointed boudoir, and a curled, perfumed dandy languidly idling at my lady's feet, dispensing pensive sighs and killing glances, while amorously warbling senseless love ditties to the twang of his guitar. And no amount of argument as to the mighty power of many of the world's great masterpieces to educate and uplift, could reconcile him to his son's having adopted it. It had moreover been a great disappointment to the able M. D. that the boy had not followed in his footsteps; but he was an indulgent parent, and too wise an one, withal, to force upon him a profession for which he had a positive distaste. He had therefore generously secured for Jack the best teaching obtainable and was now much gratified at the favorable notice his work was beginning to attract. His great fondness for the society of his children was his sole reason for objecting to the daughter's also going abroad, as the brother had been urging with more or less insistence all during his visit home; for he was extremely fond of his sister, and it was not merely as a pretext or possibility for her friend's prospective society that he now desired hers. The other girl's intended visit to Paris in the near future, however, seemed now to make it imperative that she be there with him; so his persuasive eloquence—to

which hers was of course always added—was therefore brought to bear with still greater frequency and earnestness upon both parents; until, a week later, their mother having been won over and into a dependable ally, the father's consent was naturally not long delayed.

How shall we tell of the blissful days of blissful anticipation which now followed for the hopeful, nay more, confident lover. Days possible only in the blessed Springtime of life, when hearts are young and carefree, and hope beats high within the breast. Ere the *heart-educating illusions* of life have been dispelled by its *heart-numbing realizations*; its *heart-breaking experiences*. The sun shone, the birds sang, the flowers bloomed *just* as before; but for Jack Lindsay, life had never until then contained *real* brightness or melody or sweet perfume. The benignant face of external Nature seemed to have taken on a more expansive smile in order to reflect within it the happy one illumining his very soul.

Now the Armstrong Tea and the Nichols' Housewarming, both of which occurred within a few days after Gertrude Warfield's arrival at the lake, sufficed to introduce her to the entire colony; and as everybody met everybody else practically every day, intimate acquaintance was a matter of but a short time. The girl was soon in demand everywhere; for she possessed in large degree that particular quality of the *really* charming woman; the power to attract and

attach to herself those of both sexes and all ages. She inspired love as naturally as the thirsting earth draws to itself showers of refreshment from the moisture-laden clouds, and radiated it forth again in scattered happiness, as insensibly and steadily as the sunbeams, to cheer and bless; it was good just to be near her. The secret of it all lay in her paramount consideration for others. Selfishness withers and dies beneath Calvary; and like her acknowledged Lord, in Gertie's thoughts, self came last if at all. Yet she marveled at the universal kindness which met her on every hand. "Every one is so lovely to me," was her constant plaint; and her life was a daily thanksgiving to God for His great goodness to her in this respect. Not that there was any morbid sanctimoniousness about the girl; no one could be fonder of life and all its legitimate pleasures than she; while the expression frequently upon her lips, 'the funny part of it was,' showed her quickness to detect and enjoy a humorous situation. No, Gertrude Warfield was simply a refreshing expression of harmony; of well-rounded character; of a being whom heredity, environment and possibly fortunate education had conspired to make in perfect accord with itself, with its Maker. It is not surprising therefore, that she was not only the admitted favorite of the camp in a very short time, but the, at least, tacitly admitted belle besides. Had she been a coquette, how many hearts might she have broken during that first brief Summer season; how

many scalps been dangling from her belt. Or had she been even that less harmful type of the same species, a mere flirt, how many might she have drawn to her feet; for the girl was as Jack Lindsay had so emphatically declared, *positively irresistible*.

Like all well-bred girls, Gertrude was at perfect ease in society, and in a mixed company overflowed with friendliness; not distant even with men. Alone with *young* ones, however, and this encouraging friendliness was immediately supplanted by the still more charming shyness and reserve of manner which took possession of her; unconsciously challenging to pursuit, for the treasure we prize must be hard to be won, and making of her the truly fascinating young person that she was.

But though the girl was neither a coquette nor a flirt—for with her considerate nature to have been either were impossible,—she was still what the perfect harmony of her nature of which we have spoken required; a real, live, flesh-and-blood girl, whose natural instincts and destiny were wifedom, motherhood; and to whom the attentions of the opposite sex were therefore, as ordained, pleasing. And such attentions were now literally showered upon her. Was it a ride, a drive, a climb, a row, a picnic, a lawn or croquet or house party, or what not, this unassuming slip of a girl would soon find herself the center of attraction, with well on to a dozen cavaliers, oftentimes, dancing attendance, and vying with each other for the honor

and privilege of acting as escort or partner, with the coveted opportunities thus presented for basking in her smiles. Was it an evening of dancing, the programme was never long enough to accommodate all aspirants had she even danced continuously.

All these proffered attentions were accepted with the same apparent pleasure and impartiality, and her favors distributed in the same equal ratio. All, did we say? No, not all. There was *one*—although he knew it not—whose gallantries and attentions always caused a deeper throb; a throb of *ecstasy*; and whom the awakened girl now realized of a sudden, had 'long before, taught her heart the song of olden wonder, her pulse the long, sweet thrill of rapture, and whose name her dying lips would call'; for now 'twas only *he* who left her lonelier than when he came, and her heart was as truly his—although no word of love had yet passed between them—as though the beautiful solitaire which he drew nightly from its hiding place to inspect and admire, already glistened upon her hand. There were uncertain, introspective moments when the modest young girl questioned with herself whether this were not an unmaidenly action; but the result was always the same, a failure to find any abiding reason for self-reproach. For love is not solely, indeed perhaps least of all, is it a language of words, nor does it require age or experience to understand its many tokens; since in matters of the heart, a young girl is said to be endowed with the prescience of a God. A glance of

the eye, a tone of the voice, a clasp of the hand, these all may contain the concentrated essence of thousands of spoken or written words upon the subject, and speak even more quickly and convincingly to the heart. Of such, coupled with an unmistakable fondness for her society, there had already been enough to whisper softly of Clayton Nichols' untold love; but had there still been a lingering doubt, there was always the unused boat, the 'Gertie' to silence it. So, knowing neither doubt nor fear, the willing girl rested content in the happy consciousness of this welcome, though as yet, unrevealed love; albeit, preserving towards this young man the same impenetrable, shy reserve of manner which characterized her intercourse with all others.

But what of the lover? With what emotions did *he* contemplate this numerous rivalry for the notice and regard of the girl he loved? Now to Clayton Nichols, Gertrude Warfield was, of course, the most delightful and fascinating creature in the whole wide world; and yet, with that strange obtuseness peculiar to many lovers—even husbands—he was not at all prepared for the girl's excessive popularity. It had actually come upon him something in the nature of a surprise that so many other admirers had sprung up, equally keen to discover her many charms; and as he noted, also with surprise, her seemingly equal pleasure in the attentions of these many, surprise was followed by the disturbing fear that he might even have been over-

confident as to the important place which he had occupied in the former schoolgirl's regard. He began to tax himself with poor judgment for not having put his fortunes to the test and learning his fate before leaving Denver, ere these worrisome complications had arisen. Then common sense would whisper that 'twas wiser thus; a girl so young in experience should be allowed a chance to learn her own heart; and the downcast adorer would try to take this latter common sense view of the case, feeling that while it would of course make life no longer worth the living should she *ever* care for another more than for himself, yet this was certainly the less crucial time to learn the heart-breaking truth, if learn it he must.

Now competition is as much the life of a love affair as of trade; so, fed and strengthened by doubt and uncertainty as much perhaps as by the constant discovery of new and rarer charms, the young man's love grew still deeper day by day, while kept in check, or rather swayed for a time by the promptings of common sense. Nor was the position of Jack Lindsay scarcely a more enviable one than his own, for although a very deep and ardent friendship between the girl and himself limited *his* aspirations for the time being, he surely had as much if not more to dread from the pretensions of other followers. Impelled much, therefore, by what he considered the necessities of the case, no less perhaps than longing to be as constantly as possible with and near her, his attentions to

the sweet young girl were so assiduous, that Clayton Nichols soon came to suspect in him his most dangerous rival; a compliment the ambitious fellow would have felt flattered indeed, to have known, but which though unknown, was in truth most fully returned.

Both of these fortunate young men, however, possessed a very great and a common advantage over all others, in the loyal support and assistance of a most devoted and determined sister, by the one, and an equally devoted and determined sister-in-law by the other.

To one who understood the game, knew what was going on, the maneuvers of these opposing commanders-in-chief of this momentous campaign—for such each unmistakably felt herself to be—the maneuvers of these, we say, would have been both interesting and highly amusing, for it was a constant and truly feminine planning and scheming for possession of the unsuspecting cause of them all, that thereby the interests of their respective candidates for her favor might be advanced; and it is quite safe to assume that any advantage, real or supposed, gained by the one side, caused a proportionate amount of heart-burning on the other. Not that any of this ever palpably rose to the surface. ‘The fixed rules of society’ prevented that; but it was none the less real even so.

The sketching tours, arranged with the greatest possible frequency by the artistic brother and sister, were *their* drawing card, and a most valuable asset did they

appear, since from sheer love of a sketch, Gertrude Warfield would willingly forego almost any other form of entertainment. Then there was the incalculable benefit to be had from Jack's greater knowledge, always so generously and gladly imparted in his most engaging way; and at such times there *might* be,—frequently was—of course, a suggestion necessary, or at least advisable, as to the better way for the handling of her pencil; which never *could* have been successfully demonstrated without a moment's holding of her dainty hand. There were also pleasant jaunts together, either to this or that point of vantage for sketching, or in search of promising subjects; and delightful talks upon their mutually favorite topic. All these impelling causes and more, drew the three much together and gave birth to a most charming intimacy. Naturally, the brother and sister dilated much and often upon the subject nearest their hearts, future study with them in Paris; of which their non-committal young friend always spoke as a '*delightful possibility.*'

Could Mrs. Nichols but have known why this was not promised as an actual certainty, what a relief and comfort such knowledge would have been to that much perturbed little lady; and had *Clayton Nichols* but known, how quickly would he have been found at the feet of the faithful, loving girl; for it was the intolerable thought of long separation from *him* which alone prevented, just as the one drawback to her per-

fect enjoyment of their delightful sketching tours, was the fact of *his* unfortunate exclusion from them.

But to be in ignorance is—not always—bliss, and ignorance of this truth was filling the hearts of these two persons with a needless and growing jealousy of the harmless little trips, which the simple magic of a word could have exorcised.

CHAPTER VII.

A SUSPENSEFUL WEEK AND ITS ENDING.

“ ‘You little witch!’ he exclaimed, straining her to his bosom, while he rained kisses upon lip and cheek and brow.”

Time and tide were never known to wait for any man; thus, sped on the fleet wing of enjoyment, the happy days had scurried by into weeks, which had in turn rolled themselves up and been lost in eternity. Five of the contemplated eight of the stay of the Armstrong and Nichols' households at the lake had already passed, and very disappointing ones indeed had they been to the expectant little mistress of Lakewood Lodge. Things had not gone to suit her at all; *things*, of course, referred only to the love affairs of her brother-in-law. Aside from that, it had been a most satisfactory experience, for she had both charmed and been charmed. But Clayton's mystifying delay in settling what she considered the most momentous matter of the season, had surprised her at first and was now beginning to exasperate; all the more so because of her seeming powerlessness to effect a change. She had been championing his cause to the very best of her ability, she thought, and it was nothing flattering to that ability that as yet there were no tangible re-

sults so far as she could discover. This nettled her; but deeper even than this emotion was the disinterested fear—for the young man's sake alone—that he would, by such unexpected dallying, lose the lovely girl for whom she rightly believed him to be longing with all his heart and soul. True, her championship had been altogether of her own volition, but that fact made failure no more, if anything rather less, consoling. Unlike Hattie Lindsay, *her* assistance in the affair had never been invoked, for several reasons. First, she was not the young man's sister; had she been, he would perhaps not have felt the same reticence in speaking to her of his inner emotions. Also, while Clayton Nichols was quite a paragon of his sex, he was not *absolutely* free from its weaknesses; his wings, as yet, showed no tendency to sprout. While he would not, of course, disdain to profit from any advantages which might accrue from her unsolicited managing, like many another man, he preferred to entertain the pleasing conceit that he had done the whole thing himself. Possibly, too, he would have felt less unwillingness to share the credit with *some* sisters-in-law; but *this* one, like many other women—and some men—had a perfect passion for managing things for other people, which appealed to her brother-in-law not at all. "He had no intention of letting her run *him*"; he would tell himself upon occasion. "George could do so if he wished; she was his wife and it was perhaps all right that he should; but she would never

have been *his* choice." Yet the two were always on the very best of terms.

Now for her adored husband's sake, Mrs. Nichols really felt a deep affection for Clayton; for his own, a great respect as well; a *little* of wholesome fear, possibly, also, which had in the present instance kept her in check thus long. And the young man fully appreciated the many good qualities of which *she* was possessed. For her absolute devotion to his brother, alone, he could have overlooked much; but he could not refrain from grumbling to himself occasionally, "Alice's officiousness does get on a man's nerves, *terribly*."

The situation having become well nigh intolerable to the impetuous woman, however, there were growing indications of an outbreak in the immediate future.

Now, the week's visit with them, which—it will be recalled—Hattie Lindsay had expressed the intention of claiming from her friend, had, at her brother's request, been reserved for *their* last one at the lake, that he might have the anticipated sweet memories of the same the fresher in mind when he should have taken his leave of her. For the Monday afternoon of this week, Gertie had accepted Mrs. Nichols' invitation to dine at Lakewood Lodge, remaining for the evening of croquet—by moonlight, of course—to which all the young people of the camp had been bidden; after which, her visit with the Lindsays would begin by accompanying Hattie and Jack home from the lawn fete.

This proposed visit, however, proved the 'final straw' to Mrs. Nichols' powers of endurance. She simply could not tolerate the thought of such a frightful risk. She fretted and fumed and stewed over the matter secretly, until, her patience all gone, she suddenly burst out at luncheon, on that eventful day, with—"Clayton Nichols, I really don't think you've got your proper share of good sense!"

Surprised as he was at the attack—for his outspoken sister-in-law had never presumed to administer to him so scathing a rebuke before—the young man nevertheless replied calmly, "Why, my dear sister, what have I done to merit such an uncomplimentary opinion as all that?"

"O, it's not what you *have* done but what you *haven't*," snapped out the woman angrily. "Here you're sitting still and letting another man walk right off with the girl you love. I really don't know what you can be thinking of, Clayton! You surely aren't waiting for her to come and throw herself into your arms? Well, she'll never do it"—with great positiveness—"I can just tell you that. I'm sure I've tried to help you all I could and I've told you *long* ago that she loves you. At least she d'd once, but I'm not so sure about it any longer; I don't see how she can; I'm sure *I* wouldn't if I was in her place! Marry an artist, indeed!" The woman here snorted, indignantly. "Of course he's very handsome, fascinating, and all

that, but that's just the trouble; why he'll break her heart in no time; and I believe you'd be willing that he should," she accused excitedly. Continuing: "I know what artist husbands are; we had one in our family for a few years. Well she just shan't do anything of the kind; that is, not if *I* can help it; I'll put a flea in her ear; *I'll* save that dear girl if you won't! O, if *Georgie* were only here!" the excited, nervous tremolo in her voice, by this time, almost a sob, as she ended her rebuke with a despairing wail.

Now politeness alone would have kept the reprimanded young man from interrupting this vehement reproving, even had he not felt moved at this time to appreciate the interest in his supposed happiness which had plainly provoked it. Then too, having about as nearly reached the limits of endurance as herself—he could stand suspense no longer, and had therefore decided to acknowledge his love to Gertrude Warfield that very evening before their other guests should have arrived—he was therefore in a more mellow and tolerant frame of mind than he might otherwise have been; so, somewhat to Mrs. Nichols' surprise, and greatly to her relief—for she had felt as though her interference would probably be as a bearding of the lion in his den—he replied with evident gratitude: "Alice, I appreciate your anxiety upon my account, I assure you; and thank you for all you've tried to do in my behalf. I've noticed your interest and efforts although I haven't said anything about them; and

you've certainly been most kind. But I'm afraid you're giving yourself a whole lot of needless worry, sister; *I* haven't heard of any one being walked away with, yet, as you call it." He smiled.

"But she *will* be, brother, if you don't hurry up"; cautioned the other, with most confident emphasis. "There's the Lindsays, now; why they're going to have her over there for a *whole week*; and any one with half an eye can see that Jack's just dead in love with the girl. These sketching tours all the time—trumped up excuses"—she sniffed disdainfully, "have been bad enough; but to be in the same house together for a whole seven days besides! just think what could happen in that time, Clayton; just *think!*"

But the young lover was even less pleased at the prospect of that '*whole week*' than she herself had been, and had no desire to think about its danger; it had struck still more of terror to his heart than to hers, and had in fact, been the very thing which had decided him to delay no longer, but take time by the forelock in speaking to the girl that evening; thus forestalling any disastrous consequences of her disquieting visit, if possible. His mind thus made up, he answered lightly, "O well, Alice, Jack's going away very soon, now, you know, so don't worry about *him*."

"And I bet you what you dare, Clayton Nichols, that he goes with Gertrude Warfield as his *fiancé*," asserted his companion, with a decided nod. Adding, with an approach to a sneer, "It won't be his sister's

fault if he don't, anyway; that girl's been doing nothing but *figure* and *scheme* to throw those two together ever since we got here; I declare! it's been *positively disgusting!*"

"Well, 'all's fair in war and love,' they say, Alice," returned her brother-in-law, carelessly—while inwardly smiling as he recalled how very similar had been her tactics, and those of the devoted sister next door—"so I guess we'll have to take our chances. I've got some writing to do," he finished, "so if you'll excuse me, I'll attend to it before our fair guest arrives"; and leaving his much exercised sister-in-law at the table with a puckered brow, the young man made his way to his own apartments.

Now the interview had not been a particularly enlightening one to Mrs. Nichols; in fact, as she came to think it over, she realized that it had not been at all so. She really knew no more as to the man's intentions now than she had known before. But then her object in speaking had really been more to ease her own mind than to learn the state of his, and her sputter had brought her *some* measure of relief at any rate. "He took it better than I feared he might," she congratulated herself. "I would *so* have liked to suggest a speaking to Gertie before that horrid visit, but of course, I wouldn't have *dared* go *that* far. I've put a flea in his ear, though, that I *hope* will set him to thinking; yes, and acting more lively, too. Perhaps he *has* offered himself already, and been refused; that

possibility has never occurred to me before, and of course he'd hate to tell me if that was the case. It's an absurd idea, though, for Gertie's far too sensible a girl to refuse such a splendid fellow as Clayton. Well, all I can do now is to wait and watch for further developments." She sighed resignedly. "I think it was a little mean of him though, after all I've done for him, not to tell me how matters stand; he must have known I'd like to know, even if I didn't ask right out. Oh, I *do wish* Clayton wasn't quite so close-mouthed; he'd be just simply *perfect* if it wasn't for that!"

The above were the unsatisfactory meditations of the woman; while the man—who had used his plea of writing to be done merely as a convenient pretext to end the conversation before pointed questions *were* asked—once by himself, half regretted not having set the warm-hearted creature's mind at rest with his confidence.

"Well, she'll know something definite by tomorrow, any way," was his palliating thought; "and that something will have taken this anxious load off of *her mind*, and *mine too*, I trust."

But how often do the well-laid plans both of mice and men, gang aglee! That very afternoon Clayton Nichols had been hastily summoned to the mine by tidings of an accident there, in which several workmen, including his acting superintendent, had been severely injured. There had been no time to see his loved one, of course, before starting, not even to bid

her goodbye. In fact the man's only thought upon receiving the distressing news had been to reach the place with Dr. Lindsay in the quickest possible time, and render what aid lay in his power to the poor victims. Had his superintendent not been among the unfortunates his absence would have been but short. Under existing circumstances, however, with the mine running by day and night, his presence there became a necessity for the time being, and that whole week had passed before the anxious lover felt himself free to return home and learn his fate. His dutiful exile had not been without its compensations however, for the days had been brightened by several meetings with the dear one of his heart—the ladies of the colony, many of them, being desirous of helping to care for the suffering men—and as he noted her tender ministrations to the injured, and her ready sympathy and generous but unostentatious assistance to their afflicted families, how much more deeply did he learn to love the sweet girl, and how hard it often became to remain at the post of duty with his fate hanging in the balance, and she an undoubtedly pampered guest in the home of a sure rival.

“How soon may we expect you back, Mr. Nichols?” had been her cheering inquiry however, one day when taking leave of him. At another it had been the flattering admission, “The camp seems a bit dull without you, Mr. Nichols.” And on Saturday, “You’ll *surely* come home in time for a parting game, won’t you?

Mr. Lindsay and Hattie leave us on Tuesday, you know."

He was missed, then! O, how the coveted knowledge comforted, and served to shorten, by brightening the remaining hours of their separation; encouraged him also to hope that he might not be too late with his sweet story, even yet.

But while the painfully suspenseful week had been a hard and trying one indeed to Clayton Nichols, to Jack Lindsay it had been one of continued and unobscured delight; and O, how often were its cloudless hours lived over again, moment by moment, in the long years of life which followed.

To Mrs. Nichols it had been a most nerve-racking period, which she had lived in momentary dread of the announcement of a distasteful engagement; and as an offset, she now claimed the innocent cause of her anxiety for the following week. True, there was always present with her the worrisome fear that her laudable endeavors in her brother-in-law's behalf might now prove futile, because too late; yet—hovering solicitously near—she had been so fortunate as to overhear the girl's seemingly very interested inquiry as to the expected date of his return, and this had encouraged her to hope that she was still free; "and *if free*," she comforted herself, "we shall have no more interference from the *Lindsay* family after Tuesday, thank goodness! and I myself can begin to breathe freely once more; something I've not been allowed to do all Summer!"

Thus it happened that as the eager suitor cantered up to the bungalow a little before the dinner hour the following Monday afternoon, he was richly rewarded for his enforced period of exile by the unexpected sight of a sweet face at the window; an instant later and there was a dear one at the door; and by the time he had hurriedly reined in and swung himself from the saddle, there was a fair form at the gateway to greet him home once more.

One quick, searching glance into the sweet face before him as the welcoming hand was extended in cordial greeting, was enough. That unmistakable love-light in his dear one's eyes could never have beamed for *him* had she been the affianced of another; and the peace of blessed certainty at last filled the heart of the long anxious lover.

Beckoning the officious sister-in-law—the interested and zealous champion of his suit—aside for a moment as they entered the house, the grateful man, with heartfelt effusiveness, thanked her for her thoughtfulness and most acceptable arrangement; called her the best sister in the world, and magnanimously set her mind at rest by assuring her that her wishes for action in a certain matter should be carried out before another sunrise.

Under such exhilarating conditions, the trio dinner was, of course, charming. The evening was a heavenly one; and as they sauntered home past midnight

from Hattie Lindsay's Farewell, Mrs. Nichols—whose good offices had not yet been quite all performed—cleverly brought up the subject of croquet by moonlight. "We did miss you so last Monday evening, Clayton," said she. "Didn't we, Gertie"; diplomatically calling forth the sentiments of their guest upon the subject.

"Yes, indeed," replied the girl, heartily. "Your head would have been quite turned, I'm afraid, Mr. Nichols, if you could have heard the universal grieving at your absence."

"Case of 'distance lends enchantment,' I presume"; and the gratified young man laughed. Then quickly: "But what's to hinder us having a game, just one, now, before we retire? 'Twill be the finest kind of a night-cap after that rich supper. Besides, there won't be many more chances for moonlight games; the nights will be dark again soon."

"That's a fact," chimed in Mrs. Nichols. Continuing,—with even more than her every-day enthusiasm—"Why, yes; let's play." And without waiting for any possible—though of course, very improbable—objections from their visitor, she hurried up the steps of the veranda, which they had reached, and began handing out the necessary equipment for the proposed game. Half way to the grounds, however, the satisfied chaperon suddenly faced about and left them; and in that instant Clayton Nichols first realized with what a real jewel of a sister-in-law he was blessed.

"What! aren't *you* going to play too, Mrs. Nichols?" called Gertrude, stopping in surprise.

"No, dear; not *this* time." The laugh that accompanied her hostess' words was a very suggestive one, as she added, "*Three*, I fancy, would prove a crowd." And smiling contentedly and with a merry twinkle in her eye, that astute little body hastened back to the house, murmuring ecstatically as she went, "*Croquet fiddlesticks!* the *psychological moment* has arrived! O, if *Georgie* were only here!"

"Out on a lawn, twixt the night and day,
Went a maid and a man. I said, 'Which way?'
And they both replied, 'croquet; croquet.'
Of mallets and balls the usual display;
The hoops all stood in arch array;
And I said to myself, soon we'll see croquet."

"But the mallets and balls unheeded lay;
And the maid and the man side by side sat they.
And I thought to myself, is *that* croquet?
I saw the scamp—it was bright as day—
Put his arm 'round her waist in a loving way;
And he squeezed her hand. Was *that* croquet?"

"While the red rover rolled all forgotten away,
He whispered all that a lover should say;
And kissed her lips. What a queer croquet!
Silent they sat 'neath the moon's bright ray,
And I knew by her blushes she had said not nay;
And I thought in my heart, now *that's* croquet."

Later—the very unimportant detail of *just how much later*, the writer was never able to definitely learn, *but some later*—the happy lover whispered, “Shall we go down to the wharf for a moment, sweetheart? I’ve something to show you there.”

Disengaging his arm from the girl for a moment as they reached the landing, Clayton took from his ring a key which, stooping, he fitted to the lock of boat-house number two—several times referred to in an earlier chapter—and as the fastening sprung back, threw wide open the door with a gesture which plainly indicated an expected exclamation of surprise at the *denouement*; for there, plainly revealed by the bright moonlight, hung the ‘Gertie.’

But the tables were clearly turned; no such exclamation was forthcoming; and as he stepped quickly back and again encircled his companion with his arm, drawing her tenderly to his side, the surprise was upon *his* part; for he found her to be struggling to repress some emotion which he could neither understand nor account for.

Gently raising the face which she had purposely averted from him, the puzzled lover asked anxiously, “What is it, little one? Doesn’t it please you, or was I too presumptuous?”

“O, no, no; it isn’t that!” and the happy girl now laughed outright, in a vain attempt to longer conceal her merriment. “But—but—why, you see, dearest, I’ve known about it *all* the time!”

For just one short, incredulous moment, did Clayton Nichols hold his betrothed at arm's length, studying the droll expression upon her child-like face; then, "*You little witch!*" he exclaimed; straining her to his bosom, while he rained kisses upon lip, and cheek, and brow.

'Farewell to dreams of Empire,' once chuckled the far-seeing Prince Metternich with sardonic glee, as L'Aiglon and his beloved Fanny rushed into each others' arms. 'Farewell to dreams of study with friends in Paris, for Gertrude Courtney Warfield!' sang the twinkling, morning stars, at this interesting point in our story.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WONDERFUL PAINTING.

"But only the proud sister knew * * *
that every stroke of the pencil, every touch of
the brush, had been an outpouring of **undying**
love."

A very dear old world is this!

Dear, for its cherished hours of bliss;

Its treasured stores of gladness.

A dear old world? Yes. And yet, how often does the joy in one heart rise, Phoenix-like, out of the ashes of extinguished hope in the heart of another; so that we long for that better country, where happiness shall be universal.

Now Gertrude Warfield was neither a coquette nor a flirt, as the reader already knows. It was therefore due to no wish or effort upon her part that in Jack Lindsay's heart an *over-mastering love* for herself had found lodgment. Nor was the girl in the least degree, suspicious of the fact, for her opinion of her own charms was a very modest one, and he had kept his lover-like inclinations well in check. Their intimacy had proven a real delight, and as a most dear man friend, he certainly held first place in her thoughts.

Her contemplated trip abroad with the Armstrongs had been talked of continually between them, and to their meeting in Paris a few months later, Jack was of course looking *deliriously* forward with the most utter confidence as an absolute certainty; and once there, "*she will stay*"; was his unvarying self-confident, self-satisfying assertion upon the subject. He recognized in Clayton Nichols, of course, a rival, but he also knew that, as yet, no engagement existed between the two, and the girl's expected long absence from Denver he considered as good evidence that none was imminent;—it is always so easy to make one's self believe that which one wants to. So that she come abroad *free* was all the infatuated young man deemed necessary to the successful termination of his intended suit.

'Hope springs eternal in the human breast'; and Jack Lindsay had chosen to fill himself with such an *excess* of optimism in this matter, that he was leaving the girl with *virtually* no misgivings as to the *opportunities* of the future, and *absolutely* none as to the satisfactory ending of his love affair. It would therefore well nigh bankrupt our language to fully set forth the extent and force and awfulness of the shock received by him on the morning following the happy event recorded in the closing pages of the preceding chapter.

Hattie and he having run over to the Nichols' place for a goodbye call, had found its notably cheerful little mistress in a state of happy, nervous excitement well nigh bordering on hysteria. Greetings had barely been

exchanged between them before they were informed by her of the good news; so she termed it, with—God forgive her—a very patent tinge of exultation, impossible of concealment.

“The happy couple,” so she ran on, “had taken an early morning row in the ‘Gertie’—the *dearest* little Whitehall—just launched this morning. Hadn’t they seen them go by? No? O, she supposed they had slept later than usual on account of the party which had kept them up so late, and at which we all *did* have such a *splendid* time.” Returning to her subject; “the lovers”, so they were told, “had gone down to inform Mrs. Armstrong of their engagement and get the approval which was certain to follow her knowledge of it; for it had long been the dearest wish of that lady’s heart that Gertie and Clayton should marry. She herself was simply *wild* over it,” she declared, “and Georgie would be the happiest man alive when the news reached *him*. O, Gertie was *such* a *darling*! such a *perfect angel* of a girl! didn’t they think the same? She felt sure they must, for everybody who knew her did. Clayton simply *idolized* her! The ring was superb! They would probably be married some time during the coming Winter; she hoped so, for she didn’t approve of long engagements. She was so sorry that they couldn’t be here for the wedding; not here in Denver, she didn’t mean; she should insist upon its taking place in Chicago, for it was but right that Clayton should be married from his

brother's home. She had it all planned just how everything must come off. She thought they would travel for a year, probably, and how *perfectly delightful* it would be for them all to meet after a while in Paris. She intended to take Gertie back home with her next month; O, how she would enjoy helping select the trousseau! She had been so happy ever since they confided in her this morning, that she could hardly contain herself! There! she heard oars now! they were coming!" And unable to sit still longer, their agitated young hostess rushed, beaming with delight, to the hall door, which she threw wide open to admit the engaged couple.

Now Mrs. Nichols was by no means, naturally, an unkind or cruel woman. Although she much wished for consummation of her brother-in-law's love affair had given rise to a momentary feeling of exultation over Jack Lindsay—and even more particularly over the sister whose management of his campaign had been such a thorn in the flesh to her—not for worlds would she have inflicted on the young man such suffering as the intelligence just conveyed had done. A thunderbolt out of a cloudless sky could not have been more astounding, nor have fallen upon him with a more stunning blow, than had her first words at their uttering; for they had seemed to grip his love-distended heart like a vice. He felt the blood leave it in a great wave, only to rush instantly back again, bring-

ing with it the color from his cheeks and lips. A cold perspiration started from his every pore; his confused brain seemed to reel; and it was only by clutching momentarily at the back of the chair upon which he was about to seat himself, that he was prevented from falling to the floor. His perturbation was unnoticed by their hostess however, so absorbed was she in the recital of her engrossing tale; and by a mighty effort—which, in a dumb sort of a way he understood to be necessary—Jack manfully mastered his emotion for the time, and gave no outward sign of the ordeal through which he was passing. After her very first utterance, however, the jubilant words had fallen upon deaf ears, so far as *he* was concerned. As though emanating from some far-away corner he seemed to hear the woman's voice, and was even dimly conscious of a feeling of gratitude that she continued to do the talking in such a way that no answers were required of *him*; also of thankfulness for the return of the betrothed ones, that he might get it all over with and go home. But after he had mechanically arisen at their entrance and shaken hands with Clayton, and with a sickly attempt at a smile had called him 'a-lucky fellow,' as Gertie—more radiantly beautiful than ever in the first flush of her great, new-found happiness—came forward in her sweetly modest way to receive his felicitations, a full realization of what had happened; what it all meant to *him*, suddenly swept over

the enlightened young man. As their hands met again, for an instant his heavy-laden heart seemed to arouse itself from the stupor which had fallen upon it; there was one big throb, a struggle, a gasp; then—numbness; deadness; lead.

Warmly and sincerely, but with a gaiety which it had been hard indeed for her to assume, the sister's good wishes and congratulations were quickly offered; after which, with the plea of a little more packing yet to be done, she considerably hastened their adieus, and arm in arm, brother and sister re-crossed the lawn to their own home.

Not a word was spoken between them; the actual suffering of the one, and the sympathetic suffering of the other, making speech impossible. But as the necessity for the maintaining of appearances ceased with the closing of their own door behind them, the disappointed lover sank into a hall chair, and with a heartrending groan, buried his wan, drawn face within his hands.

"Drink this, dear," coaxed the thoughtful sister a moment later, as she raised her brother's head and placed to his lips a soothing draught which she had quickly brought, "and then let me put you on the couch for a while."

"Thank you, Sis, but upstairs, please; I want to be alone," returned the other very quietly, as he handed back the glass which he had obediently drained; and

then rising wearily to his feet, suffered himself to be assisted to his room, into a lounging robe and slippers, and placed upon a couch. And when the loving sister—having darkened the room in the hope of inducing sleep—bent over with a kiss of sympathy, as he pressed her hand gratefully he murmured, "What would I do without my good sister now? Guard my secret, dear, and don't hear to any change in our plans because of this. I must get away; you understand." And with a low, dry sob, the unhappy fellow turned his face to the wall.

Jack had been taken with a sudden dizziness and headache, so the parents were told upon their return from their daily morning drive and visit to the injured miners, a couple of hours later. He was taking a nap and didn't want to be called for luncheon; she had given him a bromide and thought he'd be all right when he awoke.

Sudden attacks of illness were so unusual for Jack Lindsay, however, that much anxiety was felt by both parents at the really sick appearance of their son, when he joined them a little later; but to their immediate urging that his departure be postponed a few days, he would not listen for a moment. "It was but an attack of indigestion," so he assured them. "He had not been feeling quite up to concert pitch for a few days, anyway, and the rich, late supper of the night before had knocked his stomach out. The week in

the saddle and the sea air, would put him in fine shape by the time he got back to work; and in fact, he half believed the simple getting to work again was what he needed more than anything else; he'd been loafing too long; it didn't agree with him; his head was getting congested with the surfeit of matter waiting for expression, and that had no doubt helped to bring on the attack."

But neither the week in the saddle, nor the ensuing voyage, nor the change of scene and surroundings availed in Jack Lindsay's case; for while 'hope deferred makes the heart sick,' hope annihilated at one fell, unexpected blow, often comes very near to taking its life. The Tantalus cup of nectar, into the enticing foam upon whose surface he had been permitted for a few, brief weeks to thrust the tip of his tongue, confidently trusting to a kinder fate for future copious draughts with which to slake his growing thirst, had been suddenly and irrecoverably lowered out of his reach; killing the fires of hope which had burned so fiercely within his breast. And although, for his loved sister's sake, he succeeded in pulling himself together (after a fashion) to the end of their journey, the burden at length became too heavy; and during the severe illness which soon followed their arrival in Paris, his delirium was all about '*glorious eyes*'; and '*brilliant stars*'; and '*soft moonbeams*'; and '*Springtime; sweet, promising Springtime.*'

Some sage has written, 'there are two ways for a man to feel when God has denied him the rights of love; he can either change to a beast of passion, or he can keep safe armored in just the *chivalry* of love; as the knights of old did, when they made a vow, tied a lady's glove upon the tops of their helmets and rode forth in battle.' Jack Lindsay chose the latter.

Visitors to the exhibition the following year would return again and again to gaze at and admire a canvas entitled Springtime; and to wonder at the strange, yet splendid conception and marvelous execution, of a picture so void of all the usual and helpful accessories. There was no green field brodered with wild flowers, through which a brook raced swiftly and merrily along, as if in sheer abandon of delight at its release from the Storm-king's icy grasp. There were no song birds flitting between leaving trees, trilling their thanksgivings for the return of Spring, or hopping from bough to bough seeking for places to build their homes. There were no flowing locks and light draperies, gently stirred into motion by a passing breeze. But instead, there was the figure of a beautiful young girl, clad in a simple costume of embroidered white duck edged with blue, standing at the upper end of a croquet field, and holding in her hand a blue striped mallet, upon the handle of which she lightly leaned. There was nothing in the least appropriate, suggestive, or helpful in the representation, save the refresh-

ing *youthfulness* apparent in every curve of the slender, graceful figure; but it was through the *face* of the girl that the artist had so truthfully and vividly portrayed his subject.

The *smile* of Spring was upon the lips. The *freshness* and *fairness* of Spring were in the velvety softness and delicate coloring of the complexion. The *moods* of Spring were in the expressive brown eyes; which even as one gazed, seemed suddenly to change from gay to grave. The *sunshine* of Spring glinted from the golden hair, which framed the oval face like an aureole. The very joy of living which beamed from the countenance, bespoke the *music* of Spring within the heart; while *an atmosphere* of the *gentle charm* and *promise* of *Spring's sweet young life*, seemed to emanate from and surround the entire figure.

So perfect, so natural were the tints, that the flesh seemed fairly to pulsate with life; the eyelids to quiver; the blood to course through the delicate blue veins upon the temples. In short, so life-like was the picture as to be almost startling; it was difficult to believe that some exquisitely fair young creature had not stepped behind an empty frame, to trick the beholder.

Men spoke of the treatment of the subject as unconventional, bizarre; the work, *superb*; that of a master hand; a genius; and they began to inquire who

the talented artist and the beautiful model should be; and to speculate as to the inspiration of the thing.

But only the proud sister knew of the heart-throes out of which it had been conceived and born; that it was the reproduction of an image *indelibly graven* upon the heart; and that every stroke of the pencil, every touch of the brush, had been an outpouring of *undying love*.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MAN IN THE MOON.

"'Did you see that wink'? he asked with mock seriousness. * * * 'Another Summer troth; by Jingo!'"

Since this is a tale of many loves, we must now leave the Paris studio and salon, and journey back to the picturesque spot from whence we wandered. Shifting the theatre of action, however, from the upper to the lower end of the lake, we must also roll back the calendar to that July morning of the preceding year, when two other young people in whom we are equally interested, talked together upon this world-absorbing, age-absorbing topic. What of joy or of sorrow, of satisfaction or of disappointment has the intervening lapse of time vouchsafed to them?

Now *men* love to love; *women* to be loved; and the *sumum bonum* of love affairs for both, is that they afford these blissful experiences. Although Harold Gardiner's avowal of love had found no answering echo in Margaret Armstrong's heart, yet, being a man, he was nevertheless happy in just the loving of the girl, as he had been for months before. In addition, his fears as to her love having already been given to another had been set at rest by the disclosure, and he

was therefore in a very hopeful and still happier frame of mind than before speaking.

Margaret's expressed surprise at his ardent confession had not been in the least feigned; there had been nothing of the conventional—"O, this is *so sudden*" about it, at all; for it had in truth been a most undreamed of revelation. Yet, being a woman, its effect had been to fill her heart with a great happiness, which had in turn inspired her to a new warmth and tenderness of manner.

Casual acquaintances frequently thought the girl's nature a cold one; so dignified was she, and reserved with them; but this was a misconception of character which vanished upon closer intimacy, for she was a girl who *wore*. One had to know Margaret well to thoroughly appreciate her; never did a warmer heart than hers beat in any breast. It was therefore a very happy looking young couple that continued homeward from the spring at which we parted with them on that eventful morning.

As they neared the end of the trail, the sound of hoof-beats coming up the road opposite fell upon their ears. "That's probably Will, now!" exclaimed the girl, quickening her steps. And true enough, as they emerged into the open a few moments later, horse and rider coming suddenly into view proved her surmise to have been a correct one.

Now as far as Margaret Armstrong knew, was really aware at the time, she had spoken truthfully to

Harold Gardiner when she disclaimed being already in love. No girl, however, is wholly insensible to masculine admiration; and during the week's association of the previous Winter which had been responsible for the birth of the tender passion in Willard Manning's heart,—of which we have previously written—all unrealized by herself, virile seeds had also been sown in her own; capable, under favoring conditions, of maturing into a soul-satisfying harvest of love.

But:

Big aches from little toe-corns grow;
And destinies, for weal or woe,
Oft hang upon a word.

Little recked the talkative Mrs. Nichols of the construction to be put upon her words by *one* of her auditors, nor of the consequences thereof, when she jokingly accused their gallant escort upon the train, of "being in love,"—as the reader will now recall her having done. "Some Chicago friend of hers, I suppose, since she seems to know all about it"; was the conclusion to which the surprised Margaret had immediately jumped, it will be remembered; and the fact of the man's occasional trips to the distant city, such as the one just then ended, certainly seemed to lend color to the conjecture. This presumption had remained unchanged; and as she noted the very imposing appearance presented by the approaching

horseman, there was within her—had she but undertook to analyze the emotion—a momentary feeling strongly resembling jealousy of this supposed Eastern *inamorata*.

"How *proud* she must be of him!" was the admiring thought which flashed instantly through the mind of the girl. And not without reason; for Willard Manning was a big, sturdy, athletic fellow; a splendid specimen, both naturally and by cultivation, of the *genus homo*. He was also upon all occasions an *exquisite* in the matter of dress; and now, in faultlessly fitting corduroys and leggings almost matching his Chestnut in color, and the ease and grace with which he lent himself to its every motion,—for he was a fine equestrian—the young man appeared almost a part of the beautiful animal which he sat so superbly; and his commanding presence was just such as might evoke that proud admiration which is always an important factor in the love of a girl of the Margaret Armstrong type.

But a few paces separated them as they caught sight of each other, and Willard had brought his horse to a quick standstill and dismounted ere these were covered by the pedestrians.

"Speak of angels!" exclaimed Margaret gaily, as they shook hands; "Harry and I thought it was you as soon as we heard the horse. We've been gathering some ferns for Mamma up at the spring. I'm awfully glad to see you, Will! what sort of a trip up

did you have? Ours was a perfectly grand one!"

Now this latter acknowledgment by the girl was not at all such an one as the new arrival could have wished to hear. It would have been infinitely more flattering, not to say reassuring, to have been told that he had been missed—that the full enjoyment of the trip had been impossible because of his absence—that she had been counting the hours, minutes, even, until he should arrive. Something, anything of this sort would have been so gratifying and comforting; but to learn that the lack of his company had in no wise lessened her enjoyment, was very disillusioning to say the least. However, he could not have advanced a single good reason to himself for having expected it to be different, although he had been feeding upon the belief of having created a very favorable impression—he had certainly striven so to do—during the two days spent together prior to her departure for the mountains; he now feared that he had taken himself too seriously in that respect. Moreover, the meeting with the couple just where he did, was a little disquieting, for he knew that Fern Spring was a favorite trysting place for the lovers of the camp; and then there was that undefinable *something* again in Harold Gardiner's manner towards the girl—which to him always seemed to evince a sense of proprietorship—to annoy.

Of one thing however, he was certain; Margaret was now more charming than ever; and truly, the

great happiness with which the event of the morning had filled her heart, *did* appear to have imparted a soft, a heavenly grace to her queenly beauty.

Now love, we know, feeds upon contradictions; consequently, while Willard Manning's spirits fell a notch or two because of these unexpectedly unsatisfactory circumstances, the fire in his heart only flamed the higher.

Answering the girl's question as to his trip, he replied, "I can't say that mine was exactly 'grand,' Margaret. One doesn't really enjoy such a trip as that alone you know; but the goal was all that I allowed myself to think about, and that was alluring enough to make up for the lonesomeness; although I confess I half regretted not having come up with the rest of you, several times. But I'm here now, as you see, and mightily glad of it. How's everybody? And when did the caravan arrive?" he asked, jovially; addressing Harold Gardiner, with whom he was now, in turn, shaking hands.

"Only last evening," was the reply; "with all well. And if you could have heard the ladies regretting your absence as they did all the way up, you'd have felt abundantly repaid for your devotion to business. Nichols and I came very near to being jealous"; added the other man, generously.

"That's the truth, Will"; put in the girl promptly. "We *did* wish for you and talk about you continually. Didn't your ears burn?"

Well now that you remind me of it Margaret, I believe they did; and I kept wishing that I could know which one of you was taking my name in vain." And although the man laughed, there was even more of earnestness than jest in his admittance.

"O, we'll all have to plead guilty to that, I'm afraid," replied Margaret; "but Mamma perhaps especially." Stepping to her mother's side upon the lawn to which they had by now walked, for a good morning kiss and inquiry as to how she was feeling.

"Yes, Willard, I can't tell you how much we all wished that you could have enjoyed the delightful trip up with us; nor how pleased I am to see you this morning, so soon after our own arrival; said Mrs. Armstrong, pressing the young man's hand affectionately as she spoke. "I feel as though the family were complete now. You can find the way up to your old room, can you? Everything is in readiness for you, I think." Then turning to Margaret, "but where have you left Gertie, daughter?"

"O, up at the other end of the lake," laughed the girl; "need you *ask*, Mamma?" Adding, "I'm afraid we're doomed to see but little of her these days; the Nichols family, strange as it may appear, are going to show a disposition to monopolize her, I fancy; we left her and Clayton starting on a game of croquet; which I have no doubt will prove *exceedingly* interesting to them. We walked home so as to get you those ferns,"—pointing to the mass which had been

dropped a little further out—"aren't they beauties? You have Harry to thank for the suggestion?"

"They are indeed," replied the mother gratefully, "and I deeply appreciate your kind remembrance, Harry; I want them to replace some of Mr. Armstrong's transplanting which have died. And now shall we have luncheon?" she asked; rising as the new arrival re-appeared, the stains of travel removed and corduroys exchanged for white flannels. "The bell has already rung."

"Norah evidently considers you the head of the house"; said Margaret, as she and Willard entered the dining room together in advance of the rest.

"Norah's certainly very flattering to seat me at the head of the table," returned her companion, shaking hands politely with the maid as he spoke, and asking how she did; "and kind, beside, to put me next you."

"Isn't it all right, Miss Margaret?" inquired the girl anxiously. "Mrs. Armstrong said I was to move her to the other end as soon as Mr. Manning got here."

"Why of *course* it's all right, Norah, and particularly as it was Mamma's directions"; replied Margaret, reassuringly.

"You're surely giving Will a good training for a home of his own, Mamma"; she remarked, when grace had been said.

"Yes, and I expect never to be ashamed of my pupil"; replied her mother, proudly.

"Well up to date you certainly have no occasion to

be"; put in their guest, Mrs. Gardiner, warmly; as she noted the neat, quiet way in which the young man served.

As he smiled and bowed his appreciation of their complimentary remarks, Willard began preparing the fourth plate. "Go easy, my friend, if that's for *me*"; cautioned the Rector quickly; observing the greater abundance with which this plate was being filled.

"Too much?" queried the server. "I was merely acting upon Purcell's theory that pious folks are always big eaters. No offence, I hope." Then jocularly, "You know he always provides three times as many eatables for a *clerical* banquet as for any other."

"And how much *less drinkables?*" threw back Mr. Gardiner good humoredly. "You see the theory proves"—he added—"that for a good, dependable appetite, there's nothing equal to a conscience void of offence; beats bracers and all the tonics in the *pharmacopia*."

"And thus ruins my business"; offered his son, ruefully.

"O you've plenty of other ways to kill us off, though, Doctor." This from the head of the table.

"Now I think that's the most unkindest cut of all!" declared Margaret. "I wouldn't stand it if I were you, Harry."

"I'm not, Margaret; sitting down to it, you see."

"How is the trail now, daughter?" here asked Mrs. Armstrong—a note of unusual sadness in her tone

showing with what associations in her mind the place was connected. "Did you find many changes in it?"

"No Mamma, none at all"; replied the girl; "'twas just the same, grand, majestic calm there as ever."

"Far from the madding crowd?" asked Willard; with a significant smile, and studying the girl's face intently as he spoke. To which she at once made answer airily, "yes, completely so; we didn't meet a soul; had it to ourselves all the way."

"You probably didn't choose the right time of day for companions"; returned her questioner. "That's the—er—'meet me by moonlight, alone,' walk, that I've heard so much about these recent years, isn't it? I'm afraid there was method in their madness, Mrs. Armstrong"; he continued teasingly. Now addressing that lady, but with a quizzical look at the culprits. "What do you think about it?"

"It does look a trifle suspicious, surely"; replied the mother, shaking her head as though a bit dubious.

"There's nothing suspicious about it at all," protested Margaret. "We just came that way purposely to get those ferns for Mamma." Speaking the truth, we know, as far as she herself was concerned, although an uncontrollable blush almost gave the lie to her words.

"What's on the *tapis* for this afternoon?" now put in Harold Gardiner, quickly; anxious for a change of subject.

"Well, I for one, mean to take a nap the first thing,

and do a little practicing afterward"; spoke up Margaret. Adding—"If you're around then we might take up that duet."

"I'll be here any time you say, Margaret"; was the obsequious reply. And while the girl considered, he added—"Father has suggested a couple of hours fishing; how would, say—four-thirty do?"

"Fine."

"If you don't feel the need of a rest, Will, we'd be very glad to have you join us"; said the young man, cordially, to their newcomer.

"Thanks; yes; glad to go"; returned Willard. "I'm not the least bit tired; a week away from the chase of the almighty dollar has rested me all right. How soon do we start?" he finished; as they excused themselves to the ladies and left the room.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Mamma?" inquired Margaret, when the gentlemen had gone. "If not, I'd like to take a short nap; we shall have a somewhat strenuous evening at the Somerville's, I presume; dancing, you know."

"Nothing, thanks, dear"; replied the mother sweetly, "so take a good rest; you must be quite tired from your morning's walk. Mrs. Gardiner and I are going to the hammocks for an hour or two."

Now the girl's plea for a nap had been largely an excuse to retire to her own room and be alone awhile; for she had much to think about. The relationship formerly existing between Harold Gardi-

ner and herself was now entirely changed; and she was trying to adjust herself to the new order of things. They could no longer meet as friends, merely. His declaration of the morning had affixed the *finis* to the opening chapter of their book of association; a second and more advanced one lay open before them, and it remained for her to determine whether this should become also the last; the closing one. Henceforth, they must meet as suitor and sought, or won. While the knowledge that she had inspired his love had at first been a very sweet one, yet for the young man's own sake the girl now almost regretted that such was the case; for she realized what a vitally important matter it was to him, and if not returned might produce no light consequences. That it was *not* returned at that particular time went without saying; for as she examined her heart, she could discover there nothing deeper in sentiment than a high regard for his many noble qualities, and gratitude for his long continued kindnesses. His attentions were pleasing, 'tis true, but she could not feel that it would make any material difference in her life were they to cease; be withdrawn. She believed it might go on without any real or lasting diminution of her happiness, even should he go out of it altogether. While she would miss him in a way, it would not leave a void such as some other mere friend might not fill. "This surely was not love!" she told herself. She knew well that Harold's

for her was an *all-absorbing passion* of the heart, totally eclipsing every other emotion, and its perfect requittal, as necessary to the health, perhaps life, even, of that heart, as sunshine and ozone to the health and life of the body. And no meaner love could she be guilty of offering him in return. She must *learn* to love him in that way. Yet heart and mind instantly revolted at the thought of love being cultivated. "It should spring spontaneously," she thought, "and so strong that *nothing*, not even *death itself* could kill it; as her mother's for her dear father. *That* was love such as he deserved, and she must not disappoint him. But why could she not feel it *now; at once?* Why was not *her* heart filled with just such *commotion, tumult*, as she had looked upon in his, exposed to her view that morning, and which had almost frightened her with its intensity? Was it that she was incapable of deep feeling? She could not think so, for there *was* one whom she believed she *could* have loved in just that *tremendous* way. But then he could not have returned it," she mused, and thereupon proceeded to chide herself for disloyalty both to herself and lover, for allowing the thought to even enter her mind. Harold had been so sure that her love would awaken and for *him*, that she *must* make his hope reality. "And it need not be such an impossible matter after all," she tried to believe. "But O, why *had* he loved her, anyway, or at least, have told her about it just now; she was afraid it would spoil this Summer out

of which she had expected so much, for them both. But no; she would not let it be spoiled for *him*, at least; she would *try*; yes, she would *try*!" And with this worthy and generous resolve, the poor, worried girl sank into a troubled slumber.

Sleep did not dispel the unselfish resolution, and she awoke with a very clear conception of what she felt to be her *duty* in the premises and an earnest wish and *determination* to do it. To *learn to love* her *lover*; this was the unique task that she had set herself to accomplish, and which in the absence of other suitors might not have proven a very difficult undertaking; for an adamant heart could scarcely have withstood the young man's devotion—he had eyes for no girl but herself—and his most delicate attentions; while these were coupled also with a religious adherence to his promise of no further pressing of his suit for the time.

But there *were* others. Willard Manning, as we know, did not purpose any half-hearted campaign of conquest, nor could dilatory tactics be looked for in one of his direct nature; and the preliminary skirmish was begun on the very evening of his arrival; at the Somerville Hop.

"Don't you think you've danced enough for a while, Margaret?" he asked, as he claimed the girl for a second and late waltz—moreover, with more of request than of real inquiry in his tone and manner. "Suppose we rest awhile?" And although reason at

once cautioned that to sit it out might more surely jeopardize her unselfish resolution of the afternoon, there was a compelling fascination about the man at the moment which would have deprived her of the will, even had she felt the wish to refuse. He therefore received the very pleasing reply, "Just as you say, Will"; and accepting his proffered arm, the girl suffered herself to be led to a seat upon the lantern-lighted veranda.

Of course there was no attempted love-making, for the time was premature, the place inauspicious. But as the young man adroitly talked of how lonely the week in town had been after their departure, also of his long anticipation of her return from school, and of how glad the prospect of her uninterrupted presence in the home in future made him, although she took his words in the first instance as applying to them all, and in the second, as but a natural craving for young companionship which would again mean entertaining and life there,—her mother having withdrawn absolutely from society these many years—nevertheless, his words were falling like the soft droppings of Hermon's dew upon the seeds of love, which for months had lain dormant, deeply imbedded in the rich, mellow, virgin soil of her heart, swelling them to gradual fullness. And this expansion it was, which gave rise to a sweet feeling of contentment and pleasure in his society, and also of regret at the interruption of their *tete-a-tete* by the approach of her next partner.

Willard Manning, however, was not the only other admirer with whom the girl's favors must be divided. 'Music hath charms,' and among the musical set especially, of which she was soon the life and head—their "*Prima Donna*" they called her—there were besides himself, numerous other eligibles whose admiration was not long a matter of doubt. And this set were much together; for, styling themselves the 'Troubadours,' they would fill in every evening not otherwise occupied, touring the lake; resting upon their oars at each landing for a while to entertain their audiences upon lawn or porch with popular ballads, glees, college songs, or plantation melodies, to the tinkle of the mandolin, the twang of the guitar, or the strumming of the banjo; these evenings of music being really treats, since there were among the lot many excellent performers. Tribute, in the way of refreshments, would be levied at the close of each programme, with which to wind up the evening in an impromptu little banquet all their own at the 'Enchanted Isle;'—as they euphoniously dubbed it—a pretty little wooded spot near the center of the lake. Thus, as we have said, 'fun and frolic reigned supreme.'

But a girl may have too many strings to her bow sometimes for real comfort. While the affections, like the physical nature, are not without their hungerings and thirstings, yet for the satisfaction of these also, 'enough is as good as a feast'; even better. Margaret Armstrong soon realized this, when she found the dis-

tractions of too much attention interfering with the accomplishment of her set purpose; and this realization came in time to cast more or less of a blight over this otherwise perfect Summer. There were moments when the girl honestly wished that she and Harold Gardiner could have been transported to some desert island, away from them all. Not that he suffered in the least by comparison, but the disquieting fact was being daily borne in upon her that he was no dearer to her than any of the rest; that her feeling towards him was friendship, only; and that love for him was *not* awakening into life as he had so confidently expected, and she, for his sake, so fondly hoped. This unsophisticated girl had yet to learn that romantic love is *never*, in fact *cannot* be compelled. For every Jill there is *the* Jack; for every lassie *the* laddie. Wise and fortunate is the girl who both endeavors to and succeeds in finding hers, before the forming of other ties in life shall have made it forever too late; for in love affairs preeminently, is it true, that the saddest of all sad words are—'*it might have been.*' When they express the experience of any heart, real and lasting happiness—albeit the truest and highest—can only be found in the renunciation of self for the good and happiness of others, and in the cultivation of those more than compensating spiritual aspirations and graces with which a loving Father has endowed His children; for 'An antidote grows near an ill, in all His ordering.'

Harold Gardiner at this time seemed evidently not the man intended by Nature for Margaret Armstrong's mate; and as she found all her efforts to respond to his love prove futile, her advance sympathy for the inevitable suffering which she knew this disappointment must in time inflict, impelled the kind-hearted girl to a greater tenderness of manner in her intercourse with him; which was not only very misleading to others, but harmful rather than otherwise to the young man himself, since its motive was misunderstood.

As her fancied preference became apparent, he believed himself about to receive the reward for the generosity and patience which he had shown towards the advances and attentions of other gallants. O, how proud and happy he now felt at having fought down the many temptations to jealousy which had assailed him, instead of wronging the girl and belittling himself by yielding to them. He persuaded himself that the return love for which he had pleaded was awakening, and the deep joy of contentment filled his waiting heart.

This interpretation of motive was an entirely erroneous one, however. The truth was, Margaret Armstrong's added consideration sprang partly from a sense of community of suffering; that 'fellow feeling' which 'makes us wondrous kind.' For as we have said, while all her endeavors to find in her heart a

chord responsive to Harold Gardiner's had proven futile, no better success had attended her equally earnest efforts to stifle a growing but unsought love for another. She despised herself for it, denounced it to herself as a violation of the ethics of true womanhood, and forced herself to believe that the secret suffering which she was undergoing because of its supposedly hopeless nature, was but a just punishment for her weakness. And thus, as the happiness of the lover increased, that of his loved one waned; both upon his account and her own.

Now it had required but a very few days of renewed association under the same roof with him, and the attentions so pleasingly delightful, which Willard Manning at once sought every favoring opportunity to bestow upon her, to cause the swelling seeds in her heart to burst into life; and with a pang both of alarm and regret the girl suddenly understood that romantic love *had* at last awakened in her, and for whom. But Margaret's nature contained much of the stuff of which heroes, martyrs are made; and warned by the sweetness and depth of passion—that glorious flower of love's beautiful plant—which filled her heart, she at once set out to conquer it.

While her more encouraging manner towards the *acknowledged* lover from this time misled but to rejoice, her marked and suddenly discouraging attitude towards himself was disappointing in the extreme to the *unacknowledged* one; and made the quick and ag-

gressive attack upon the citadel of her heart which he had intended, out of the question. Her friendliness, her evident pleasure in his company was as cheerfully noticeable so long as they were surrounded by others; but the desired and needed opportunities for *tete-a-tete* she would studiously avoid; or, if, as occasionally happened, the young man's constantly exercised ingenuity succeeded in securing for him what seemed a favorable opening or situation, instantly, some excuse would be trumped up for leaving him. Her evident wish to escape him at such times, together with her apparent preference for the society of the other, at length forced Willard Manning to the reluctant conclusion that Harold Gardiner was the man of her choice. Yet upon occasion, seeming indifference to the latter would again cause this young man's expiring hopes to revive.

But the swiftly passing weeks were hastening the class-man's play-day to a close. Several times had he attempted to engage the girl in a second conversation upon the subject so heavily weighting his heart; but at each attempt, her pleading, 'Just a *little* longer, please, Harry'—for she would fain postpone the evil day—had silenced him.

The evening before his departure had now arrived however; that of the day in which had occurred the serious accident at the 'Alice' mine,—of which the reader has been fully apprised—the date also of Mrs. Nichol's lawn fete; at which croquet by moonlight was

to be the chief feature of entertainment, it will be remembered.

All through the long Summer day had the anxious young man been endeavoring to learn his fate, according to the previous promise of the girl, yet upon one pretext or another, it seemed, he had been studiously avoided. But as they found themselves at last together for a moment at one end of the croquet field during a game, wistfully scrutinizing the beautiful face, he spoke softly and said, "This is my last evening with you, you know, Margaret, and I must—"

"Yes, yes, Harry; I know"; interrupted his companion quickly, though gently; "we'll talk at the spring going home, if you wish."

"If I wish!" exclaimed the impatient lover; "can you doubt it? What is it to be, Margaret?" he whispered imploringly. "Am I to be made the happiest or the most miserable of men?"

"Ssh!" cautioned the girl, as another player joined them; stepping briskly to her wicket for the next play as she spoke.

Now, as on several other previous bright evenings, a jolly crowd of young people from the lower end of the lake—themselves among the number—had planned for a home-going by way of the trail,—before written of—and led by the wag of the colony, Mr. Charles Chapin, the solemn, old woods always rang gaily to the tune of their singing and laughter.

Fern Spring was situated about one-third of the

distance from the end of the trail. During this Summer it had been enclosed with a pretty rustic arbor, containing many little drinking cups of the same attractive style; and when it was reached, the customary halt was called for a rest upon its comfortable settees and benches and to refresh themselves with the delicious drink. Their usual master of ceremonies at such times being the irrepressible Mr. Charles Chapin, of whom we have spoken, while the remainder of the party disposed themselves about the arbor, he at once began filling and distributing the numerous cups; holding his own aloft for a moment at the last, to deliver himself of an always expected harangue.

"Ho, all ye men and maidens!" he cried impressively; "drink to the many heart-rending, hair-raising, perspiration-starting, rock-splitting Summer troths here plighted!"—dramatically pointing to a slight crevasse in the wall of rock opposite, in confirmation of his last used adjective. "Yes, here," he continued, "at this very spot, depressed by the callous knees of despairing lovers, whereon I now stand. How often upon such occasions has the man in the moon winked, and then discreetly veiled his eyes for a moment with the obscuring vapor of a passing cloud;—as I myself can most truthfully affirm." Concluding, "Now, Bob, let's hear from you."

When the usual laughter and applause which greeted their leader's remarks had subsided, Bob, one of Gertrude Warfield's great and open admirers,

caused much amusement by responding with—"Long live our jolly hostess of the evening, her fair dinner guest, and the artist lover; but *blarst* him if he ever filches from our loved city its prospective treasure."

"You next, George!" where-at one of the young members of the Troubadours, with a sweeping bow to Margaret, then delivered himself of—"The beautiful *prima donna* in our midst; may she win her laurels without the aid of the divorce court or stolen jewels."

"Now, Bert"; next called the toast-master; and without hesitation, another young sprig rattled off—"Here's to sparkling water—good for wifey, son and daughter—drink it down!" obeying his own command by draining his cup and calling for another.

"What did you leave the old man out for?" inquired the leader; as he re-filled the emptied cups.

"Had to; wouldn't fit in; besides, he generally wants something stronger," returned the youth.

"Truly, most excellent reasons, young sir"; said Charlie. "Now, Will," he commanded, "toast the ladies." Whereupon, Willard Manning, in none too gracious a frame of mind towards the opposite sex because of Margaret's disappointing demeanor towards himself, in a rather sarcastic vein responded with, "The ladies; 'in our hour of ease,'—for Easter bonnets prone to tease. 'When pain and anguish wring the brow,'—progressive euchre claims them now, or whist club needs them at the prow."

This most uncomplimentary allusion was of course

greeted with a storm of indignant protest from the girls of the party. "You were told to *toast*, not *roast* us, Mr. Manning!" "That's a *libel* on our sex!" "I wonder how many refusals it took to bring him to that *scandalous* opinion of us?" "Why I thought your mother had him better trained than that, Margaret!" "You'll have to take him in hand, that's sure!" and the like, followed each other in quick succession.

"Thanks; I most emphatically decline the honor"; laughed Margaret; adding, "for he must surely be an impossibility, since Mamma has failed so signally."

"Faith, but you're a nervy one, Will, to get off the like o' that here and your market not made yet!" commented the leader. Finishing, "But truth's stranger than fiction, any day."

"Well! it seems to me that you're only making a bad matter worse, Charlie Chapin." The leader's sister pouted in an aggrieved manner as she spoke. "Only adding insult to injury."

Her brother hastened to apologize. "I beg a thousand pardons, ladies. No offence meant, I assure you; but we men have to stand together you know, to even half way hold our own," he went on, diplomatically. Then,—“Fred, you give us one on saw-bones.”

"Well, here's to our departing butcher. May his slaughterings all be crowned with success, to the end that his pockets soon bulge with fat fees."

"Your turn now, Doc."

But Harold Gardiner's thoughts had been far away from the general merriment, on a, to him, much more important matter; and after meditatively scratching his head for a moment, he begged to be let off. But the leader was inexorable. "Not much; no partiality here"; he announced. Adding, "if you can't rake up a better *motif*, here's one!" at the same time passing the reluctant toaster a fifth cupful from the spring.

"O, well, if I *must* bore the company," protested Harold,—with a decidedly bored expression upon his own face—"here's to plain, unadulterated *aqua pura*; a fine ablutant, but the more you drink, the more you *can't* think; a shining example right here." Tapping his pate, upon the crown of which at the time, the hair was beginning to thin a trifle. "And now, Chapin, finish up!" he concluded, tersely.

"Well *my* think factory seems to be shut down for repairs, too, for a wonder"; remarked the leader, facetiously, after a moment's pretended reflection; "so I'll have to take the same stale subject I guess; fortunately it's not a dry one. Here's to the cup that cheers the *nit* inebriate; that's me. And now let's move on"; he ended; when this closing toast had been drank and the cups replaced. And singing lustily, 'We won't go home until morning,' the fun-loving procession once more started down the narrow trail.

Now, as pre-arranged, Margaret Armstrong and Harold Gardiner had lingered at the spring; but Willard Manning, who brought up the rear—a prey to

melancholy reflections—was the only one of the party to notice the fact; and he made no comments. Once, however, when the leader had called out in his jocular way, ‘what meaneth this lack of hilarity upon the back seat?’ he had replied a little testily, “O, we’re *thinking*, for a change! follow our good example.” But as they came out upon the highway and the good-nights were being said, the absentees were of course, missed.

“Why where’s our *prima donna* and saw-bones?” exclaimed one young man, in surprise.

“Conspicuous by their absence, all right”; replied the leader, after looking the party carefully over. “Well, they’re pioneers up here and can find their way home I suppose when they get ready to come; we won’t lose any sleep upon their accounts.” Then, as if moved by a sudden suspicion, he glanced quickly up at the moon. “Did you see that wink?” he asked; with mock seriousness. “No wonder the Doctor was in such a stew for me to quit!” And as a diaphonous cloud just then went sailing across the face of the distant satellite, their wag threw back his head and burst into a hearty laugh; slapping his knee a sounding whack as he exclaimed, “Another Summer troth; by *Jingo!*”

CHAPTER X.

RENUNCIATION.

"'You will not refuse me **somewhat** of a lover's privilege for this once, I am sure,' he pleaded; immediately clasping the girl in a fond embrace and tenderly kissing away the tears that blinded her eyes."

Now the rest at the spring had in reality been but a very short one. The giving and drinking of the various toasts, with the laughter, applause or comments attending upon each had been continuous, thus consuming all told only a tiny fraction of an hour; but for Harold Gardiner, an *Eternity* could scarcely have dragged out its weary length at a more monotonous pace. He wondered how he could ever have found anything to enjoy in such stupid nonsense, as he now mentally classed it; yet it was just such diversions as these, that made up the sum total of the restful and healthful daily programme of their simple life at the lake; where every trifling happening or occasion was seized upon as a pretext for fun and frolic. This night, however, it had all jarred upon the impatient young man.

He had slowly followed their companions for a few paces as they again took to the trail, to avert suspicion as to the intended defection of Margaret and

himself from their ranks. The girl, however, had remained at the arbor; and as she stood thoughtful, motionless, with hands lightly clasped before her in its artistic entrance, the silvery moonbeams falling full upon and around her, she presented the appearance of a most realistic, full length portrait, set in a rustic frame; and a strikingly *handsome* portrait, at that.

From her dainty kid boots to the ribbon about her throat, she was a symphony in white; gowned in a daintily tucked and ruffled organdie of an exceeding fineness of texture and perfection of fit and finish, the full, deep-yoked waist confined to her figure by a softly folded satin belt, into which was tucked a generous cluster of most perfect scarlet geraniums, with which Harold had presented her at starting. Her wavy, dark hair, turned carelessly back from a snowy forehead, was arranged at the nape of the neck in a loose knot; against one side of which nestled a second cluster of the same gorgeous blooms, which scarcely rivaled the rich coloring, now, as at all times, running riot in her cheeks. A wealth of tenderness lurked in the depths of her dark eyes, though a close analysis would have shown it to be a *pitying* tenderness; such as might dwell in the eyes of a mother grieving over a wayward child, or in those of a Saviour sorrowing for a lost world.

As the retreating footsteps and singing began to die away a little in the distance, Harold turned quickly

back towards the arbor; delight, expectation, longing, speaking no less eloquently from the spring in his step, than from the smile upon his lips.

Reaching the girl, charmed beyond expression at the exquisite *ensemble* which met his gaze, he took her unresisting hands in his and carried them for a moment eagerly, yet almost reverently to his lips. "And *now*, Margaret!" he exclaimed, in a tone of passionate inquiry; his *whole soul* in his eyes.

"Harry," began the girl,—while something like tears seemed suddenly to tremble upon the silken lashes and in the warm tones of the softly modulated voice—"when you told me of your love that other morning, a new world opened before me, and no girl could have been prouder and happier than I. The pride is no whit less tonight, but the happiness has been drowned in sorrow because of the disappointing answer which I must give you. I have studied my heart carefully, Harry, and there is no different sentiment there; friendship has not given place to love."

After a moment's hesitation—during which he had led the girl to a seat within the arbor and taken his place beside her—the lover slowly replied, "I cannot deny that this is a disappointment to me, Margaret, and a good deal of a surprise as well; for your growing kindness and graciousness of manner during the happy weeks that have passed since our former conversation on this subject, have tempted me to the sweet belief that I was becoming something more, and dearer to you, than a mere friend."

"I hope it has not been mistaken kindness upon my part which has led me to this course, Harry," spoke the girl, regretfully, "but believe me, it was prompted solely by my advance sympathy for your coming disappointment."

"That is like you, dearest," returned the grateful young man, "but you must not let the need of additional time worry you; it will not me. There is no cause for haste Margaret"; he went on indulgently. "In one of your earnest nature, love will no doubt be longer taking root; but I shall have no occasion for complaint upon that score, for it will make it but the deeper and stronger; and I could never be satisfied with a *weak* love."

"Nor could I be guilty of offering you one less fervent than your own, Harry, and O, how *hard* I have tried to feel it."

An almost imperceptible sensation of pained astonishment that it should have required *effort* to love him took possession of the ardent wooer for an instant, at the girl's last words; but passed as quickly, leaving no faintest trace of resentment in his words or manner as he protested confidently, "but it will *come*, Margaret, it will *come*; and I can wait, as I told you before."

"I must not let you build upon false hopes though, Harry," here ventured the girl, tenderly, "since—"

"But I am perfectly *willing* to wait, Margaret," interrupted her companion, "and to take my chances

for the future. I simply *cannot* consider this answer as final; why life would become the most *harrowing* reality for me if I felt that I must do that! No dearest; let me leave you with hope, at least," he pleaded. "I can be more patient now that I know you to be still mistress of your heart; that it has not yet been given to another."

"Harry," now put in the girl, desperately, "if I could give you the least ground for it, how gladly would I have you continue to cherish this hope for which you plead; but I cannot, and it would be the very refinement of cruelty for me to deceive you further. I am no longer the mistress of my heart as you believe. Love *has* awakened in it, but unfortunately, it is—"

"Not for *another*, Margaret!" burst out the man, incredulously—shaking off the hand almost savagely which had been laid upon his in token of sympathy as the girl spoke, and jumping to his feet as though electrified by her words—"Don't tell me that!"

"Yes, Harry, for another!" was the slow, sorrowful reply.

"O, God!" came with a groan from the young man's lips; as he sank back upon the settee and buried his face within his hands.

'If you want a man to sense the pains of Hell,
Before you pitch him in just keep him in
Heaven, a spell.'

Harold Gardiner had certainly been very near to this beatific state for a long time, as we know; and during these later weeks, he had so magnified every morsel of seeming encouragement, that the awakening from his happy dream of almost confident hopefulness, was indeed a rude one.

Now, there are *colorless hours* in life which might easily be condensed into *seconds*; and there are *seconds*, so full of happening, so fraught with consequence, that eventful *years* might almost be subtracted from them, and yet leave a remainder.

For many, many hundreds of such consequential seconds did Harry Gardiner sit thus, with bowed head and covered face; the convulsive tremors which from time to time shook his frame, alone giving evidence of life within it. Once Margaret, alarmed, herself torn with emotion, had lain a hand gently upon his shoulder; but he had moved away at the touch, as though it were repulsive to him; and she had ventured no further manifestation, although her heart was bleeding in common with his.

In that bitter hour, memory—as though to mock his unhappy fate—was busy setting in review before him the long, joyous years, first of boyish dream and later of manly hope, in which *he* had been the adoring subject, and *she* the unconscious queen; the inspiration and the fulfillment, the Alpha and the Omega of all his thoughts and longings, his plans and expectations; until she had become so interwoven with the fabric of

his being as to seem really a part, a *vital* part of it. And now, this cruel disenchantment; this ruthless leveling of his fairy structure with a word. "O, it is too hard!" he protested to himself, angrily; "I will not submit to it! I will not be cast off thus! she may love another if she will, but she must at least divide her love with me; I will accept a *part now*; the time will come when I will have it *all*; for there are *means*, and I will *use* them; I will hesitate at *nothing*; stoop to *anything*, but I will have her!"

But at length, he slowly raised to his adored one, a face, no longer that of the light-hearted boy it had hitherto appeared, but one speedily transformed by an agonizing experience into that of a man; and not of a man in years merely, but of one in whose eyes the gleam of victory told of the hard won battle of a *strong* man over self.

"Can you forgive my rudeness?" he offered penitently; drawing nearer to the girl once more and taking her hands in both of his. "I have been such a brute! But O, Margaret, you can have no conception of what this means to me"; he added with indescribable pathos in tones and manner. "Never again to awaken with the long cherished hope of one day calling you my own; never again to be able to plod through the tasks of the day, cheered by the thought of your proud interest in me; never again to have my dreams glorified with the vision of a home blessed by your loving companionship. And yet, believe me Margaret," he

assured her, "my heart contains no reproaches. I alone am to blame for this joyless awaking, for I have deliberately set my face against the truth. I have more than once seen your eye brighten, your breath come quicker, the color deepen in your cheek at his approach; but like the fool that I was, I have blinded myself to it all. Love is ever thus you know, to what it does not wish to see, and had you been so unwise as to hide the fact of your awakened heart from me, out of sympathy—as I fancy you may have felt at times like doing—*upon my soul*, Margaret, I believe I would have been tempted to accept the sacrifice even though I knew it to be such. But he has been generous, noble and good as he always is, and I cannot be too thankful that you did not, for you will be happy with him, and from that knowledge *my* happiness will flow; since you can never cease to be as you always have been, dearer to me than self; yes, dearer even than life!"

Now Margaret Armstrong's feelings upon learning that those secret emotions of her heart which she had believed so effectually concealed from all had been fathomed, and especially by this young man, contained probably an equal mixture of mortification and astonishment. While he had mentioned no one by name, 'a guilty conscience needs no accuser'; and there was no doubting to whom he referred. O, how she longed to tell him of the hopeless heaviness in her own heart, which made it capable of comprehending his so much

more fully than he supposed, and at the same time made it as much an object for sympathy as his own. But many considerations forbade this, and she felt obliged to suffer in silence.

"Yes, Harry," confessed the girl, as he ceased speaking, "there *have* been times when it has seemed impossible for me to tell you this, and dash the cup of hope with its attendant happiness from your lips; but I see now how useless and wrong it would have been for me to have attempted to hide it from you, and it is a great comfort to me to know that you approve my course. But Harry, much as I appreciate and am flattered by your devotion to *me*, remember. I would not have it doom you to a solitary life; it will be one of the happiest days of mine when I hear of your engagement and marriage to some girl who fully returns, and is therefore worthy of your *splendid* love."

"That you must not expect, for it can *never* be, Margaret"; replied her companion, with instant decisiveness. "Would you have me offer to another" he went on, almost chidingly, "a heart which contained a grave? One haunted by the ghost of a dead love? But mine would be an even greater insult, for it would contain a *living* love, and a throne whereon sat a crowned queen, at whose feet my daily homage would be paid. Would you have me offer a secondary place then, to one who bore the sacred name of wife? Perhaps I would have loved you too dearly, Margaret.

I think I would have made an idol of you, and God would never have stood for that. No, dearest, since I am denied life's crowning glory, the love of the one I love, I will *never* marry. But this shall not make me hard and bitter"; he hastened to affirm; "for he whose heart has suffered and not been made tenderer thereby, has in it less of the man than brute, 'tis said. From the cup of anguish and the bloody sweat of this *my* Gethsemane, my heart will come forth very sensitive to other's woes, I trust. My profession will bring me continually into contact with suffering and sorrow, and I shall try to find consolation both in an unselfish giving of the best that is in me to the alleviation of physical pain, and in helping to bind up the broken-hearted. Happiness, we are told, lies not after all in selfishness, but in service; and I, too, will be happy."

"Surely I hope so, Harry," answered the girl, earnestly; deeply affected by the young man's noble words; "and yet upon your account I cannot help feeling that it would have been so much better if we had never met."

"Margaret, He who sees the end from the beginning, knew best; let us leave it to Him. For myself, I am thankful for this love, hopeless though it has proven to be, for without its blessed inspiration I doubt if I should ever have accomplished what I already have and still hope to, and as the beacon light of my life it has guided me safe past those rocks and shoals upon which so many less favored young

mariners have made shipwreck. Temptations crowd and jostle each other for place upon the ocean of a young man's life, Margaret, and there is no restraining influence so powerful upon him as an *absorbing passion* for some *pure young girl*."

"And now, must we indeed part, Margaret?" he faltered, as the girl arose to leave the arbor;—concealing as best he could the exceeding bitterness of the pang. "Then let our good-byes be said here, in this hallowed seclusion; for I could not *bear* simply to take a formal leave of you in presence of others. My very early start will be sufficient excuse for your not seeing me off. You will not refuse me *somewhat* of a lover's privilege for this once, I am sure"; he pleaded, immediately clasping the girl in a fond embrace, and tenderly kissing away the tears which blinded her eyes. "Queen of my heart and life, *forever*," he murmured passionately—though with an enforced resignation—as he held her thus, "farewell! Would to God that I might be permitted to exchange whatever of brightness that may come into my life," he went on—clothing his thoughts as before, in a poesy of expression which was with him an innate vernacular—"for the inevitable clouds which must at times darken yours; though this is of course a boon which cannot be granted me. But may there be only *just enough* of those clouds, dearest, to make its sunset a glorious one; and whether your heart thrills with joy or bleeds in sorrow, remember always that if

known to me, mine will be beating in unison with it. I have but one more request, Margaret; these flowers that you have worn tonight."

Choked with emotion, the girl took from her waist and hair the flowers which had been his gift; and with trembling hand, laid them silently in the young man's waiting one. Then, suffering her quivering lips to be raised to his, received upon them the long, despairing kiss of quenchless love, but shattered hopes.

CHAPTER XI.

DISPELLED MISUNDERSTANDING.

"'You don't mean to say that you've been loving me ever since **then**, Will'?"

When they reached the house our young friends were both much relieved to find that the family had retired; for neither was in any mood for conversation and visiting. As Margaret bent over her mother for the usual affectionate good-night, she said: "I'm very tired Mamma, and would like to sleep late in the morning."

"Very well, daughter; but have you forgotten that Harold leaves us then?"

"No, Mamma, but so early that we have said our good-byes tonight; he doesn't expect to see me again."

"Is he taking my little girl's heart with him?" asked the doubly interested mother; detaining her hand and drawing the girl to a sitting posture beside her upon the edge of the bed; "for I know that was his dearest wish"; she explained.

"No, he isn't, Mamma," replied the daughter, sadly, "although he has offered me his, filled with such a love as any girl should be proud and glad to accept. I think it must be fully equal to Papa's for you"—

which in Margaret Armstrong's estimation had always, and rightly, represented the very acme of devotion. "O, Mamma, Harry is a *prince*!" she finished, with glistening eyes.

"Why did you refuse him then, daughter?"

"Because my heart could not respond to his, Mamma. Why, Harry has been loving me for the last ten years!" she went on, with marked surprise. "You know how devoted he has always been to me, though I had never thought of it as anything but a continuance of our childish fondness for each other, until he told me of this love the morning after our arrival, and begged for mine in return. Ever since then I have been trying to make myself believe that I really could return it; but it was no use, and it has nearly broken my heart to tell him so, as I have been doing on the way home. The disappointment was a terrible one to him, Mamma! I could not have believed it possible for anything to have caused a man such suffering as that did him for a while; it almost made me feel that I had done wrong in refusing him. Did I, Mamma?"

"No, daughter"; answered the high-minded parent, with unhesitating decision. "The *wrong* would have been for you to *have* accepted him knowing that you had no love to give, for you would have been sure to make his life unhappy, and it is a *crime* to dispense avoidable unhappiness. The greatest care and deepest self-examination are needed in choosing a husband or wife, Margaret," she continued, with great serious-

ness, "and even with it all, mistakes will sometimes be made. Balzac, you know, has one of his heroines to say: 'There is but *one* man in the world for each of us; and frequently, he whom we were formed to treasure, is not the one whom we have married believing that we loved him.' Ordinarily, I think a woman who is loved and well treated by her husband, even if there be not this perfect heart union between them, will be sufficiently absorbed in the relationship of wife—and of mother, if she be blessed with children—as to not recognize her true mate should she be so unfortunate as to meet him when too late; but it must be an inconceivably sad experience for one who does. An exalted sense of duty, an over-plus, almost, of honor and principle, and a firm faith, one or all of these will be needed to keep such an one from forgetting her irrevocable—'until death us do part.' Now Harold is a splendid fellow, one whom I have always thought much of and greatly admired, and I should have been both proud and happy to have taken him to my heart as a son, had he been your choice; but I cannot be too thankful that you did not defraud him. Did you refuse him because of love for another, daughter?" ventured the unobtrusive mother, delicately.

Now either one of the girl's admitted suitors would have been a perfectly agreeable son-in-law to Mrs. Armstrong, as we know. Simply that her daughter's *heart* should be sole arbiter in choosing between them, uninfluenced by an expressed preference of her own—

for which this girl would no doubt have asked had she been advised of the proposed suit of either in advance—was the selfless mother's wish; and she had therefore refrained purposely, from such advising. But had her direct question at this time been answered, light would have been shed as to the direction of Willard Manning's love, which would have at once removed her daughter's false impressions, and spared both herself and the man much unhappiness. Extremely sensitive upon that subject however, the truthful girl started to reply: "No Mamma"; but quickly checked herself and instead, begged of her parent not to ask. "I'd rather not answer that question, please, Mamma; at least, not tonight; some other time, perhaps." And kissing her mother affectionately, Margaret retired to her own room.

"Cécile," she said,—as the maid, her attentions finished, was about to withdraw—"I wish to sleep late in the morning; see that I am not disturbed, please; good-night."

When the door had closed upon the retreating figure, the agitated girl sank upon her knees and offered a fervent prayer for the rejected lover; closing in a burst of relieving tears with a supplication from the beautiful duet which they had so many times sung together: 'O, Angels of Heaven, guard him from evil!' While in the adjoining moon-lit room sat Harry, bowed in an attitude of the deepest dejection, but with dry eyes riveted upon the likeness of a young

girl who strongly resembled herself, though many years her junior, which he held before him, and by a strange coincidence, pathetically repeating from the closing words of the same ardent love-song: 'Life's long dream is o'er; farewell! farewell!'

In yet another room of this same hospitable cottage, Willard Manning had also passed a restless, unhappy night, endeavoring to prepare himself for the offering of congratulations the following morning, upon the expected announcement of a distasteful engagement, which must surely follow the recorded loitering of the evening before at Fern Spring, so he believed. He was much more than surprised therefore, to learn that none existed; and the knowledge gained from the mother that the girl was yet free, was relieving and cheering in the extreme.

The only young man in the house after Harold Gardiner's departure, it was but natural that he should now pay the more attentions to its daughter; and no rankling feeling of pique prevented his hastening to avail himself of the favoring circumstance at first. But to the girl's longing yet troubled heart, his gallantries were such torturous delights, that she preferred to forego them, and he was therefore kept at arm's length as before.

There was never any lack of proffered escort from among whom for the popular young beauty to choose when a jaunt of any sort was afoot, and the seeming gaiety of her purposely promiscuous favoring of these

many, soon inclined this one—whose mortifying experience it usually was to find himself among the rejected—to wonder if he had not, after all, been mistaken in the girl, and if she had not in her the makings of a genuine coquette—a type of woman that he most thoroughly despised.

- But a near-at-hand day was to reveal to him how little he had understood Margaret, and what an injustice he had done her by such a suspicion, even. A trip for this enlightening day had been arranged at Clayton Nichols' suggestion, for Gertrude—now his *fiancée* of a week—Margaret, Willard and himself, to one of the points of especial interest in the vicinity, Sky-top Mountain; distant from the lake about five miles.

Now this name 'Sky-top' was somewhat misleading, since the mountain was not noted for height, as was many of its neighbors, but rather for its steepness, picturesqueness and unusual features. It was really one of the low peaks of the range, whose ascent however was difficult and laborious because of an utter absence of marked trails. By some mighty convulsion of Nature in a probably far-a-way past, its lowest spur had been rent from it, leaving between it and the part thus detached, a cleft, something over four hundred feet in depth and from two to two and a half in width; and through this narrow passage the more adventurous spirits of a party who had made the ascent, would take a certain pride in making their way

down again to the road or trail whence they had started.

Now the parting of the mountain had been a *ragged tear*; not a clean-cut stroke. Resultant *points* and *ledges* of rock, which *jutted* out from *either side* of the 'Great Crevice'—as the cleft had been named—at frequent, though irregular intervals, served the purpose of *steps*; and down these, a sort of *zigzag* descent had to be made. Covered with a greenish dampness which inclined to slipperiness, and with the distances between, in places, such as to make it necessary to all but relinquish hold upon the upper ere the feet were firmly planted upon the next below, it was a feat which required a certain amount of courage to attempt, and steady nerve to perform; but given these and the exercise of due caution, could be and occasionally was performed.

The only real danger connected with the undertaking lay in a possible meeting with a Rattler; for in common with many of the mountainous sections of our country, the Rockies are infested by these venomous snakes; thousands of them traveling to their numerous caves at the approach of Winter each year, where they huddle together in bunches until the end of the cold season, then *mostly* come forth again to bask in the warmth of Spring.

But although there was always the possibility of such an encounter, there was no well authenticated account of one on record, so far as this jolly quartette

knew; and such a contingency was certainly farthest from their thoughts, as they enjoyed their leisurely ride over the hard mountain road on that loveliest of Summer mornings, to the picturesque canyon out of which 'Sky-top' reared itself.

A tempting luncheon to which their sharpened appetites had done full justice, had been dispatched and followed by an hour of wholesomely lively chat, when, dressed in complete Alpine suits and with stout staffs to aid them, they had at length reached the summit of the tedious spur; their horses left to await their return, tethered in the canyon below. After a needed rest at the top, Clayton Nichols, who had several times before made the descent—followed of course, by Gertrude—started to lead the little party through the Crevice.

"O, please wait 'til *we* get part down; a little out of the way, Mr. Manning"; requested the girl, with some trepidation, as that gentleman began an immediate following. "These steps look pretty slippery," she explained, "and I can't say that I altogether relish the idea of having any one light on my head in such close quarters as this."

"Why certainly, Miss Warfield; with pleasure"; replied the man, drawing back. "Just call out when you're ready for us to start."

"Thanks; we will"; returned the other, disappearing from view beneath a projecting ledge, as she spoke.

"All O. K.," called back her escort a little later,

when they two had covered nearly a third of the distance; and at the summons, Willard and Margaret at once began their descent.

A rambling fire of comment and exclamation, accompanied by more or less of light laughter, was now indulged in by the two detachments, and all went 'merry as a marriage bell'; until the vanguard, with a gay 'good-bye,' had passed from the Crevice out into the canyon again, and the rear had also left more than half of its descent above it.

Suddenly, from the ledge on the opposite side upon which the man's next stand must be made and but two feet below, came an ominous sound; and quickly drawing back the foot which he was even then in the act of lowering to it and looking in the direction whence the sound had come, Willard was horrified to behold upon it an immense snake, which had made its way to the spot through a horizontal fissure in the rocks; drawn, no doubt, by the sound of voices.

Now no person who has ever seen one of these dangerous reptiles coiled, ready to strike, with its enormous, triangular shaped head elevated, its protruding fangs, its brilliant, fiery-irised eyes from which seem to shoot forth venom, and its whole body vibrating with such excitement as to cause the buttons of its tail to rattle together with a sharp, clicking sound, can ever possibly forget its repulsive, forbidding appearance.

Such was the sight which met Willard Manning's

eyes; and though he had never in life been thought of as in the slightest degree a coward, yet for one terrible moment as he gazed almost fascinated at the vicious, ugly looking thing, and realized the narrow escape he himself had just had, as well as the grave danger which yet confronted them both—for that companions of the hideous thing might be in close proximity and at any moment make their appearance through corresponding fissures, above, below or on a level with them, was but a reasonable fear to entertain—the blood in his veins seemed to congeal and he felt all the hair of his body beginning to stand on end.

It was impossible for them to go back, for the reach immediately above had been a long one, and his companion could not possibly have secured sufficient purchase upon the slippery edge of the projection to draw herself up again, nor was the cleft wide enough at this point for her escort to crowd past and assist her, as he became possessed of the wild idea of attempting, for an instant; although to have done so would have meant a certain fall to probable death on the rocks below, for them both. There was therefore no other alternative than to go on, but the enemy must first be dispatched.

Reaching back to his hip, the man took from his belt a sharp, short-handled camp hatchet, always carried upon such trips for any emergency which might arise. "Don't move or speak, Margaret!" he now commanded sternly, to the astonished girl two steps

above; and then at once loosing his hold upon the projection overhead, stooped, and bracing himself as best he could against the rocky wall, raised his hatchet, and with a terrific blow which *must* not fail, bore down the angry viper's head to the ledge and severed it from its body.

But his footing upon the narrow, slippery, projecting shelf, had been too insecure for so violent a motion; and losing his balance, the man pitched forward and went crashing headlong after the dismembered head, which had fallen to the bottom of the Crevice.

With her heart at a standstill, and rooted to the spot as she had been by the sense of some imminent danger conveyed by her companion's extraordinary command, Margaret Armstrong stood transfixed with horror at the quick blow which followed, and the sickening sound of his falling body as it went bounding down against the jagged sides of the cleft, until a death-like silence told of its rest at the bottom. Then she opened her mouth to scream; to call for help; but "Will!" "Clayton!" "Gertie!" each in turn froze upon her lips. A feeling of frenzied haste to reach the man she loved, now took possession of her, filling her with an almost irresistible mad impulse to fling herself down, and join him in the probably ghastly death which had been his fate. But the blessed self-control in the girl's nature now asserted itself and stood her in good stead for a time. Once, several years before, she had been through the Crevice with her father; and

by the remembrance of the location of most of the jutting points thus obtained, was able to make her way with greater confidence and speed, down past the still writhing but fortunately harmless body of the snake—which she now saw for the first time—on and on until the unconscious man was reached.

“O, Will! Will! speak to me!” cried Margaret feverishly, kissing the bruised and bleeding face as she knelt over him for a moment to lay her ear to his heart. But there was no response to her call; and snatching the soft felt hat from her head and placing it upon a rock at her side, the terrified girl laid the loved head tenderly upon it, then rushed on out into the canyon, frantically shouting for their companions.

Naturally absorbed in each other at this time, and with no thought of mishappening for the rest, the engaged couple had wandered back to their starting point at the opposite side of the mountain; but as their friend’s piercing, distressed cry rang out upon the stillness, both made an instant dash for the Crevice.

“Quick! quick!” implored the hatless, wild-eyed, pallid girl as they came in sight; and then, rushing back, the intensity of the strain over now that help was at hand, sank senseless at her unsuspected lover’s side.

“O, is he still alive?” was her tell-tale question a quarter of an hour later, as she opened her eyes and looked up into the tearful, anxious face of her friend bending over them.

"Yes, Margaret, thank God! his heart and pulse are still beating; Clayton waited only long enough to make sure of that"; replied her friend. "But what a *frightful* experience you must have had, dear!" she finished, sympathetically stroking her friend's forehead and kissing her repeatedly as she spoke. "But however did he come to fall?"

"A horrid snake, Gertie"; shuddered the other; "and he must have lost his balance killing it; I was above and didn't see. I tried to call out and couldn't, and I don't know how I ever got down the rest of the way. But, O, if you and Clayton had only been here to help, he could have had attention so much sooner; now it may be too late!" she faltered, vainly trying to choke back the tears as she reached over and took the limp hand tenderly in her own.

"*Please* don't say that, Margaret!" pleaded her companion; "for I am already consumed with regret that we were not; but of course we didn't think of anything happening."

"I know it Gertie," acknowledged the other; lovingly pressing the caressing hand, "and I shouldn't have said that. But O, why don't they come!" she exclaimed impatiently, attempting to rise. The strength however, seemed every bit to have gone from her limbs and Margaret sank back with a helpless groan. "*Do* see if they're not in sight, Gertie?" she begged.

"Not quite in sight yet, dear," was the report, as

the girl returned from her fruitless quest a moment later. "But they must surely come very soon now, for it seems hours already since Clayton started."

In an incredibly short time, however, considering the distance, Dr. Lindsay was bending over the injured man and questioning Margaret as to when and how and distance of the fall. "I find no broken bones," he at length informed the anxious group about him, "but this gash in the temple's an ugly one, and there's a nasty lump at the base of the brain. I'm a little afraid the shock and shake-up may result in a concussion, but we'll hope for the best as to that and any internal injuries; fortunately there's no bleeding from the mouth. It's a great mercy his neck wasn't broken, for he evidently pitched head foremost; and it would have been, no doubt, and some limbs, too, only for those projections which broke the force of the fall. But we must get him home now as quickly and easily as possible."

Tom, the coachman, having followed in the wake of the others, with the carryall, from which the seats had been removed and springs and a mattress laid upon its floor, the injured man was carried carefully home in this, to be tenderly nursed back to life and health; and principally, by a distracted, because loving girl, who could seldom be persuaded to leave his side. There were at first several days of anxious watching, when it was feared that consciousness was doomed never to return; but when the crisis was at

length safely passed, there was relief and joy not alone in one household, but throughout the entire colony—for Willard was a universal favorite—that day his eyes had first opened with a look of recognition in them.

"It would be a real pleasure to be sick thus, Margaret"! were his grateful words to the faithful girl, a few days later, as he opened his eyes from a refreshing nap, to find her, as usual, seated at his bedside in the partially darkened room; a newly received magazine in hand with which to entertain him should he feel so disposed. "Only that I hate to think of the recreation and pleasure it's depriving *you* of."

"O, don't worry about that, Will," was the cheery rejoinder, as the young nurse bent over him, and gently raising his bandaged head, readjusted the pillows to possibly greater comfort. "It's no deprivation, at all, I assure you. I hope you don't think I could find any enjoyment in such things while one of the family's lying here so sick! Why I'm not *quite* so heartless as all that, Will! Besides, it's really a *pleasure* to be able to do a little something towards brightening these tedious hours for you," concluded the girl, warmly.

"Do you *really* mean that, Margaret?" exclaimed the sick man eagerly, with manifest delight, and yet as though half inclined to doubt.

"Do I mean it? why of course I do!" quickly returned his devoted attendant; adding in a rather hurt tone, "have you any reason to doubt it, Will?"

"Then let it be not only my sick hours, but my well ones, too; my whole life!" burst out the man. "O, Margaret, I love you; be my wife!" he now pleaded; affectionately taking her hand.

"O, *please* don't talk that way, Will! now you're spoiling it all!" exclaimed the girl. Instantly withdrawing her hand, while a deeply pained look settled upon the beautiful and noble face. For Margaret Armstrong's extremely high sense of honor had been outraged at once by this seeming gross lack of loyalty to a previous and absent sweetheart. Out of mind because out of sight, she thought.

"But why should I not talk that way, Margaret? Are you not free to listen?" asked the man in quick surprise.

"Why yes; *I* am free enough; but *you*; that *other* girl!"

"What other girl, Margaret?" questioned her mystified companion.

"Why that Chicago girl; the one you—er—love!" she blurted out.

"But I don't love any Chicago girl!" protested the man. "On the contrary I'm not even acquainted with any girl there. Why what put that notion into your head, dearest?" he asked, very lovingly, and again possessing himself of the withdrawn hand.

"Why Mrs. Nichols said so."

"There's surely a great mistake or something here, somewheres, Margaret!" now exclaimed the puzzled

man, excitedly. "Such a story as that could only have been made out of whole cloth, and Mrs. Nichols is not a woman to do a thing like that, it seems to me. Besides, she could have no conceivable motive. When did she tell you this?" he demanded.

"Why—don't you remember Will? On the train coming out; when she accused you of being in love"; replied the girl, with some hesitation, and a bit sheepishly, it must be confessed.

"Any other time?" persisted the determined questioner.

"No," said Margaret, with a confirming shake of her head.

"Why my dear girl!" now exclaimed the relieved and smiling lover, as he settled back upon his pillows and drew the 'dear girl' nearer; "how you have been deceiving yourself! Mrs. Nichols was referring to *you!*"

"Referring to *me*, Will!" repeated the girl in blankest surprise, though with a noticeably brightening face. "Why how could *she* know that you loved me, and at *that* time, too?"

"Simply because her quick perceptions in such matters detected it when we were all at home together last Winter."

"You don't mean to say that you've been loving me ever since *then*, Will!" ejaculated the girl, incredulously.

"I most certainly have, dearest, and with *all my*

heart!" came the quick and hearty response to this astonished question.

"Well then, Will," confessed the enlightened girl, bashfully looking up after a moment's thoughtful pause; "I believe it has been mutual!"

"Then you are *mine*, Margaret?" exclaimed the lover rapturously; as with a momentary accession of strength he suddenly assumed a sitting posture.

"Yes, Will"; whispered the girl, sweetly.

"Then come to my arms, dearest! my very own, *at last!*"

And waiting for no second invitation, a radiant though blushing face was quickly hidden over a heart that had long been held in needless suspense, but whose empty chambers were at length filled to their depths with a far more than compensating satisfaction and joy.

CHAPTER XII.

TWO WEDDINGS.

"Since the world began, the Sun had never shone upon two handsomer or happier brides."

'A merry heart doeth good like a medicine'; hence, Willard Manning's recovery was so rapid from that glorious day of dispelled misunderstanding, that ten days later found the Armstrong and Nichols homes at the Lake closed for the season, and their erstwhile occupants once more a moving cavalcade over the mountains. Of the charm and delight of their previous trip we have already written at length; but these were mild compared to those of the return, for the whole party was now infected by the exuberant happiness of four of its number, for whom, since then, a new existence had begun. The Sun of its first bright day had arisen with no cloud casting a shadow athwart its golden beams; in fact, they were yet revelling in the faint, rosy streaks of its new and ever brightening dawn, and every moment was therefore freighted with undimmed lustre and unshadowed joy.

Ah, those halcyon days! particularly in the life of a girl. For while love is but a part of his life to man, to woman it is the whole. And these early days of love's dream, it is, which furnish a first, and indeed welcome excuse for that extravagant hero wor-

ship, so dear to the average feminine heart; when to Angelina's innocent, confident love, which doubt *cannot* assail, Algernon is not merely a hero, but the actual *composite* of all the virtues of all the heroes and all the saints of all the ages. Blissful ignorance! where is the disappointed soul bitter enough or cruel enough to disturb it?

Mrs. Nichols was also in an exceedingly jubilant frame of mind, for she was hastening home to meet 'Georgie'; now a passenger aboard a home-bound ocean liner, and charged moreover with the delightful and important duty of assisting not only one, as she had anticipated, but two brides-elect in the selecting and ordering of their *trousseaus*; for the lovers had each urged a speedy marriage, the dates of which had been set for the late Fall, in consequence. It became necessary therefore for Mrs. Armstrong to conserve her meagre strength—which had gained but little during the Summer—against the fatigue of these and intervening functions; so that she had felt obliged to forego the pleasure of the trip with her daughter to the Eastern metropolis, where all the bridal finery was to be made.

Now in matters of dress, there are just three really important, red-letter days in the life of a girl, be she richer or poorer; the wardrobes of her dolls, her own *trousseau*, and the outfit of her first-born. Our girls were now arrived at the second milestone, and one must needs have been through the mill herself, in order to fully comprehend the thrill of those weeks

in the 'Windy City'; each day ushered in, as it was, with a heart-fluttering wait and listen for the post-man's ring, and closed with a final perusal of the last precious love missive—already gotten by heart. While the hours between comprised a delightful round of shopping tours and visits to modistes and milliners by day, and of entertainments by night; for it was the opportunity of a lifetime for their proud hostess to present two such attractive, now doubly interesting girls, to the large circle of her own and her brother-in-law's admiring friends.

Yes, those were delightful and truly *busy* days; for shops must be ransacked to find the many needed and proper accessories for every gown; corresponding hats and shoes and gloves must be ordered to accompany and complete every costume; and there were endless fittings of linings and the most careful giving and noting of detail for the wonderful creations to be built thereon. In *Lingerie* alone, would their varying types permit of sameness, but the duplicate order placed for this, called for a bewildering array of the finest of cambrics, lawns and dimities, set off with billows of filmy lace run through and bowed with daintiest of ribbons, and exquisitely monogramed.

But the business of the happy days was at last accomplished and our young friends again at home and preparing for the elaborate 'Tea,' at which they were formally introduced and their engagements announced to Mrs. Armstrong's hosts of friends, and these immediately thereafter began vieing with each

other in offering the usual round of complimentary entertainments, which combine to make of the antenuptial days of a favored bride-elect, a season of such pleasurable and memorable gaiety; all leading so gracefully up to that crowning event of events, her marriage.

But of those two weddings—solemnized but a few weeks though many miles apart—which followed these festivities, it is not our purpose to weary the reader with detailed accounts, although suitably brilliant affairs they both were. Margaret's taking place in the loved home in which she had been born and reared, her dainty young friend her only attendant; Gertrude's in the spacious Lincoln Park residence of Mr. and Mrs. George Nichols, Chicago; at which the matron of honor was naturally, Mrs. Willard Manning.

Many months of leisurely European travel followed these notable functions, its itinerary extending from East to West and from the River Nile to the North Cape; the pleasures of which were of course doubled, because participated in jointly by the newly wedded pairs, so thoroughly congenial in tastes, and all so fond of each other. But details of this, also, we must omit, save an account of its one disappointment, contained in the following extract from one of Margaret's Paris letters to her mother, which ran: 'The charm and delights of this entrancing city have been as great for us, I take it, as they were for you and dear Papa on your honeymoon tour, and evidently are for all

visitors to it. It has held for us our first disappointment, however; missing the Lindsays, whom we have all been looking so happily forward to meeting upon our arrival here. But Jack, it seems, has suddenly become famous through a wonderful picture sent to the Spring exhibition, and for which—so we hear—large sums have been offered; his name is on every tongue. Hattie and he have just started on quite an extended vacation, so we found the studio and their apartments closed, and the precious canvas safely stored; thus we have missed seeing it, much to our regret, of course, but you can well imagine how proud we all feel to be able to claim friendship with the talented artist.'

Now it is not with *conjugal* love, but *romantic*, that a tale such as this has to do; hence, its limitations forbid any extended reference to the perfect and enduring felicity which crowned the unions of our worthy heroines with the husbands of their hearts' choice. True, other hearts had *bled* and *suffered* that these well mated couples might wed; but as in neither instance had this been caused by coquetry or fickleness, there were no accusing, remorseful consciences to mar the happiness of Margaret Manning or Gertrude Nichols; and certain it is, that since the world began, the sun had never shone upon two handsomer or happier brides.

END OF PART I.

PART TWO

BY EARTHQUAKE AND FIRE

— or —

THE CHECKERED ROMANCE of TWO GENERATIONS

PART TWO

CHAPTER I.

GOOD FORTUNE AND BAD—TWO ORPHANS.

"For 'tis the living, not the dead,
Who feel Death's biting sting."

Facing the ruddy glow and pleasant warmth from a blazing pile of fragrant pine logs, that hissed and crackled in the commodious fireplace of a cozy sitting room in one of the most pretentious homes in the city of Denver, Colorado, one chilly October evening in the early eighties, sat a sprightly and pleasantly agitated young matron, with puckered brow, well sharpened pencil in hand, and telegram pad upon her lap, alternately scribbling and tearing up; scribbling and tearing up. Not until a round dozen of the ruled yellow slips had helped feed the flames at which she toasted her small, well slippered feet, had a dispatch to her evident satisfaction been framed, and, with a deep-drawn sigh as of relief, placed in the hands of the patiently waiting messenger whom she had

shortly before hastily summoned. A gushing announcement, typically feminine as to length, upon the blank, ran: 'It's a girl—An exaggerated copy of the lovely mother—So now you know just what an exquisite little darling you're uncle to.' The message was addressed to the Lincoln Park, Chicago, residence of Mr. George Nichols; and but a very few hours later the equally typical: 'Sincerest congratulations,' had been wired back by its expectant recipient.

It will not be necessary, we think, for us to introduce to our earlier readers the sender of the above jubilant and very eulogistic message, who must surely be at once recognized as the officious sister-in-law of Clayton Nichols' courtship days; and whose interest in all that concerned him and his was still so deep and lively, that she had journeyed westward for the sole purpose of being present upon the momentous occasion of the birth of his first-born.

'It's a girl,' she had stated. And rapturously welcomed into life as this child had been, never was a little *daughter* more earnestly desired than she, either; especially perhaps by the young mother, and particularly after the birth, a few months before, of a son and heir to the neighboring household, that of the Mannings.

Now Margaret Armstrong and Gertrude Warfield during their college days had been as constantly together and as much to each other as the most tender

and affectionate of sisters. The bond of friendship which had at first, and so quickly, sprung up between them, had very soon ripened into the most real of love; and as time went by, and with the perfect complement of their natures the one to the other making a jar of any sort between them impossible—their *affairs du coeur* had fortunately not crossed—this love had seemed to develop into a positive passion. The dread of separation in after life, held almost, if not quite, as much dread for each, as could have existed had they been the same true lovers of opposite sexes. Surely it had been a gracious fate which decreed that the business interests of their respective husbands should tie them to the same spot; Clayton Nichols, prior to his marriage, having resigned from the superintendency of the 'Alice' mine, and established himself in a stock brokerage business in their growing and promising city; and located in adjoining homes, the young matrons were still therefore the same constant companions as during girlhood days.

Well qualified and equipped as they were to adorn it, Society, in a round of splendid affairs, had hastened to open wide its doors to welcome them to its ranks, upon the return from the joint honeymooning abroad; and two years of gaiety had been theirs before that any weightier cares first fell to the lot of either. Then came the advent into the world of little Robert Armstrong Manning; a finely formed boy, who appeared to fully vindicate the theory that the children

of *love* are usually beautiful and intelligent; for over his conception, like a brilliant star, an unusually deep, mutual affection had shone, whose glowing yet tender light seemed to have settled in heavenly benediction upon the child. Other babies there were as fair and good perhaps, none more so; and many were the encomiums heaped upon him, none of which probably was more highly descriptive, sincere, or more deeply appreciated by the proud young mother, than that of Winnie, her laundress; to whom, in moments of excited forgetfulness, the new made parent was *yet* but the young lady of the house.

“O, but it’s the broth iv a b’y ye have there, Miss Margaret!” was her delighted exclamation, at sight of the few days old child—a three-by-six smile of conscious pride in her young mistress beaming from her homely face—“a broth iv a b’y, wid yer own beautiful eyes a-lukin’ up at me so knowin’ loike out o’ ’is father’s foine shaped head; an’ ’im that smilin’ an’ happy lukin’ that it’s doin’ me own heart good to be a-seein’ ’im; God bless ’im! Shure an’ it’ll be the pride o’ me loife to be a washin’ an’ a-ironin’ ’is faery clo’es!”

Now, mothers, like poets, are born, not made; and the birth of this child, proved our Margaret to have been richly dowered with those pre-eminent characteristics of the true mother; selfless love and untiring patience. Utter devotion to the requirements of the little son at once became a passion of life with her.

Nurse might get together the elaborate paraphernalia for his bath, and grandmama sit by to offer the suggestions of experience; but only by the hands of the adoring mother might the actualities of the task be performed, and the glowing little body arrayed in its dainty apparel. And when, at last, the drooping lids had hidden from view the innocent, baby eyes, filled with wonderment yet turned so trustingly up to her's as he clung to the fountain of life, when the eager lips had relinquished their hold upon and the delicate, rosy fingers had ceased their caressing wandering over his white, shining world, and clasping him to her heart, entranced with happiness and overpowered with gratitude, she had tiptoed to the snowy white crib to lay her precious burden among the fresh, cool linens, even then it was difficult to tempt her from his side; where she would sit and listen anxiously for the gentle breathing, the while dreaming such wonderful dreams and building such towering castles for the future of her blessed eldest.

Moreover, in her loved friend, the fond mother had ever a listener in full and sympathetic accord with all her most extravagant imaginings, an equally energetic discoverer of her baby's charms and a no less ardent admirer of them. Together they would sit daily beside his little bed, weaving the most roseate of romances, in which little Robert was always the fairy prince who should come and carry off the little heiress next door; "*for of course, if we should have a*

daughter, as we hope we shall, now that little Robert has come—they will grow up to *love each other*, and *marry*"; was the never varying and most confident assertion of Gertrude Nichols at all such conversations. "O, Margaret!" she would exclaim, rapturously, "just picture the joy of that day when we shall see our two dear children made one!"

As we have already learned, there was no disappointment in these matters, from when little Robert had been the pet and plaything of them all for just four months and a week, the desired little daughter had been sent to gladden the hearts of her waiting parents; thus making *possible* that union between their descendants—should both children live—so feverishly longed for by the inseparable mothers.

Fair and slightly as a lily in person, it had required but a very few months of life for those about her to discover the further fact, that the same distinctive grace and sweetness of disposition which crowned the parent like a celestial halo, also shed the lustre of its perfecting rays upon the ethereal loveliness of her offspring; thus making of the thing of beauty a joy to all, as well.

Alice Gertrude, they called the little stranger; for the lover-husband *would* have the name of her dear mother perpetuated, and Aunt Alice had pleaded irresistibly for a namesake. And little Robert,—talking even before he could walk—early formed the habit of hitching himself across the floor of their respective

nurseries to the side of his slightly younger companion, and patting her pretty cheek or kissing her tiny hand with a very near approach to gallantry, would murmur in his baby jargon: 'Deah Awice; pittty Awice!' At which the little maiden would laugh and coo with the most evident relish and delight; such cunning scenes always filling the hearts of Margaret and Gertrude with the deepest joy, since they appeared to them unmistakable evidences of that fondness for each other upon the part of their children, so fervently longed for by both during pre-natal days.

Now, while the furnishing of these brief details as to the disposition of these two very young children towards each other, and the *cause* lying back of it, may strike the reader as unimportant, we trust this portion of our tale will not be passed over without careful noting, as it holds the key to a fair and intelligent judgment of their *future* conduct, when, by the natural progress of our story and the ceaselessly revolving wheel of Time, they shall have been whirled into the center of life's stage; there, in the lime-light, to engross our attention, as unaided and alone they play the parts assigned them in its drama, and by the excellence or failure of their performance incline us to approving *encore*, or mayhap, to an ignominious hissing of them from the scene.

At the time with which we are now dealing, however, they were—

‘But fair, frail gifts; uncertain as the rifts of
light
Which lie along the sky; and might not be there
bye-and-bye.’

As the irrepressible little beings developed into thinking, acting personalities, the perfect suitability of their natures to each other became conspicuous to all; the one, though bold, masterful and imperious naturally, plainly dominated by a sense of chivalry and a protecting fondness; the other, timid, yielding, worshipful. As a tender vine, upspringing beside some sapling oak, finds encouragement and support in clinging to and twining its projecting tendrils around the firm though slender trunk, so in all their childish intercourse, to little Alice, Robbie was the all-sufficient one; he was her oracle; from the absolute infallibility of whose judgment or opinion there was with her no such thought as appeal. At the age of five, he had taken up the quaint and strange habit of speaking of her to every one as ‘my little wife;’ after which, the oddest and seemingly prophetic conversations would frequently be heard between them. Were they having what they termed a little tea-party, over their make-believe it would be: “Where did you get this tea from, father? I think it’s very good”; and the little man would reply: “Why, I got it from Morgan’s this time, mother; I’m glad you like it.” (Copying their elders, of course.)

These, and many similar striking expressions would not so much amuse as make *glad* the hearts of the listening mothers; for while to others they might sound dull and uninteresting by repetition, they were to them indicative of that *pre-natal betrothal* of heart between their offspring, for which these sister souls had so devoutly longed.

Now, if it be true as we are told, that like is begotten of like, then for children born and bred amid such favoring circumstance as these little ones, none but the most perfect ultimate development of their dual natures might with reason be anticipated. Time will tell. True it is, that as the dainty bud of *Childhood*, gradually unfolding, disclosed to view the spreading petals of *Youth's* bright, beautiful flower, there was visible no 'destroying worm i' the bud' to later gnaw defacing blemishes upon the inner heart leaves of either of these most promising young plants, and their deep, ingenuous and growing fondness for each other was cause for constant comment among friends; by whom they were often jokingly referred to as 'the Siamese Twins'.

Thus, upon these two households, unrelated by any ties of blood though virtually one in interest and thought and purpose, each containing, as it did, a beautiful, devoted and loving wife and mother, a proud and most tender husband and father, and an idolized and affectionate child, not *burdened* with the responsibility and wearing care of *useless riches*, but rather *blessed*

with an *enjoyable competence* which permitted a generous and cheerful giving to the needs of those less favored than themselves, surely it might be said that with lavish kindness had the gifts of God been strewn.

There is nothing the *world* so grudges us as happiness, however, we are told; although up to this point in the lives of these highly favored families, it's ever smiling face had been a striking refutation of the pessimistic charge. A full decade had now passed since their inception, in which no startling, unusual or untoward experiences had marked the flight of time, and for several succeeding years, also, the same blessed humdrumness of existence which had hitherto made their lives ideal, was theirs; leaving us with practically no new thing of them to record, save that in the meantime, the pure spirit of Mrs. Armstrong, one of the noblest and best fitted that had ever tenanted a house of clay, had been recalled to the God who gave it, and Willard Manning had been elevated to the presidency of the banking institution in which all of his working life had been spent.

Financially able, as both were, to allow themselves considerable of gentlemanly leisure, these husbands had always taken time to become acquainted with their families, by participating to an unusual degree in the pleasures of their wives and children, thus extracting from them the maximum of enjoyment; for extended joys always increase. A number of happy Summers had these constant associates passed together at the beauti-

ful Lake, so precious in its memories and associations; some few, for variety's sake, had been spent at Eastern resorts; during that of '91 they had all made a tour of the British Isles; that of '92 had been given to Chicago and vicinity, doing the great Exposition in a leisurely and comfortable fashion. The Winters had mostly been spent at home, where abundance of domestic and social pleasure was their happy lot.

Up to this time, we pause a moment to repeat, life's aspect had been ever *smiling and bright*; but 'Into each life some rain must fall; some days must be dark and dreary.' Were it not so, the *otherwise productive garden of the heart* might become so parched and hardened 'neath the burning heat from constantly unclouded skies, that the gentle fruits of the spirit, unable to force their growth upward through the sun-baked soil, arrested by the confines of their narrow bed, must ultimately wither away and die. Misery, however, does not like to be alone; thus it happens that *troubles*—like our wife's relations—frequently indulge themselves in that obnoxious habit of pouncing down upon us in unwelcome companies of twos and threes; and 'born to trouble as the sparks to fly upward,' these, our long exempted friends, were now about to have meted out to them an overflowing cup of sorrow and disaster.

It was the early Spring of '93; that well remembered year of industrial depression and hard times. Collections were slow and unsatisfactory, values

steadily shrinking. The banks of the country were overhauling their securities, subjecting them to very searching examinations, and calling in loans upon all but the very gilt-edged ones as rapidly as possible. The Armstrong-Sherwood Banking Company, old established, conservative and unquestionably sound, was following the general policy, and in pursuance of it, President Manning had planned a hurried trip to the then comparatively new Cripple Creek mining district, to acquaint himself more fully as to the value of certain very promisingly described properties there situated, upon which loans had been made during his absence of the previous Summer; and as Clayton Nichols—from knowledge and experience an authority on such matters—had offered his services as examiner of these mines, together the friends had one day set off for the district; making the first stage of their journey, to Colorado Springs, by rail, thence with livery rig and driver, through deep, dark canyons and up and down the slopes of towering mountains, to their destination.

The return of the rig having been expected four days from hiring, when it had failed to put in an appearance during the fifth, a horseman had been sent out over the proposed route in search of the belated party, and at the bottom of a rocky gorge, hundreds of feet below the precipice over which they had fallen, was found the battered, lifeless remains of men and horses, and the wrecked vehicle. There was no one

left to tell the tale of their unhappy fate, but the supposition was that the brake had failed to work when they began the steep descent after reaching the summit on the return trip, frightening the horses, who had become unmanageable and backed themselves—probably so unexpectedly and quickly—over the slope, that the occupants had been given no opportunity to jump and make at least an attempt to save themselves by rolling down the mountain. It had been a most appalling accident, with but one mitigating hope: death must have been instantaneous to all.

Thus were Margaret Manning and Gertrude Nichols, whose lives for so many blissful years had been inseparably bound together in the supremest joys and happinesses of life, plunged also together into the depths of its deepest woe;

For 'tis the living, not the dead,
Who feel Death's biting sting.

While the grief of each of these devoted wives was crushing and heart-breaking in the extreme, in the case of Mrs. Nichols it resulted in fatal prostration; for her nature—as we once advised our readers—had not in it the same degree of force as that of her equally bereaved friend, and her powers of endurance, naturally weaker, had received no strengthening or even stimulation, from the unbroken sweetness and even tenor of her life. As we have formerly described

her, Gertrude was a being made essentially for loving and petting; and save for the sad, early loss of her parents, life's touch upon her had been one long, enduring caress. Both as lover and husband, he to whom she had given her fresh young heart and life, had made her the object of his adoration. To see that not even a momentary shadow of disappointment, anxiety or care should be cast upon her heart or mind, seemed always to be his chief thought and aim in life; and his greatest source of happiness lay ever in the consciousness that Gertie felt happy and looked pretty. Theirs had indeed been a home where Mamma reigned supreme; for apeing her father's constant and beautiful example, the little Alice had soon formed the quaint and pretty habit of petting her mother, and of studying to discover and of catering to, her slightest suspected wish. It was not strange therefore that such a sudden and awful tearing from her of the husband who had so unspeakably endeared himself to her, should have taken out of Gertrude Nichols' heart what had grown to be a vital principle, and without which—hard though she strove to do so for her loved daughter's sake—it was not possible for her long to live. Six months after he had been laid away, the yearning, heart-broken wife was resting by his side, and Alice, now a sweetly interesting young girl of quiet, retiring disposition, just in her teens, like as her sainted mother before her, had been left an orphan at a very tender age.

But troubles, we remember, seldom come singly. On the morning following that pathetic double funeral of its representative citizens, the community had learned, with astonishment and horror, that the Armstrong-Sherwood Banking Company, one of its old and supposedly dependable institutions, had not a dollar in its vaults; that eighty thousand in cash—which its cautious president had been hoarding against the possibility of any sudden panicky run upon it, and which moreover they were known to contain but a few days before—and double the amount of its most valuable securities—to be held doubtless for ransom—were also missing; that the cashier had suicided during the night, by hanging 'neath a trestle near town, and that the bookkeeper, his son, had skipped the country.

Now, not from any suspicion of the men, but simply as a wise business precaution, had the president of the institution long been urging an experting of the books; but the suggestion had each time met with such pronounced opposition from some of his older, brother officers as being an unwarranted reflection upon the ability and integrity of such old and trusted employees, that it had been deferred. It was now, of course, done at once, and revealed the almost incredible fact, that by a very clever and original system of manipulation—which it is unnecessary and would perhaps be unwise to elucidate here—father and son had for years been carrying on a systematic stealing of the bank's funds. This money, it developed, had all been lost in the

wildest of speculation, and they were beside heavily in debt. The coming on of hard times had probably robbed them of the hope of *recouping* their losses and making good their speculations before discovery, as they had quite likely intended doing. The exposure that would follow a natural overhauling of the books upon the advent of a new head, would of course end their opportunity for further operations, and it was supposed that in a moment of reckless desperation they had decided to make off with a fortune. When and how the booty had been removed and where cached were matters of conjecture to be perhaps solved later. The fact that the lifeless body when found was fully dressed, even to the hat, and that a small valise containing some travelling necessities was beside it, indicated plainly that both the culprits had intended flight; but overcome by fear or remorse, the nerve of the elder had evidently failed at the critical moment, and the last short act in the nefarious drama in which both had been starring, had witnessed the ringing down of the curtain upon the father, fearful of the judgment of his fellows, rushing unbidden to the bar of an offended God, and the son, a solitary fugitive.

It had been one of those disheartening instances of men who had long been identified with a community and stood well in it, going wrong, which inflict such a startling, disagreeable shock, and leave such a festering, painful sore upon its confidence; while the sad and haunting *pity* of it was, that a young soul should

have been lured or even helped down from the dignity and honor of its high estate by the very one responsible for its being. 'Better were it for such an one that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea.'

The wrecking of this bank, sad to say, had made a very appreciable difference in the financial condition of our widowed friends; the combined fortunes of Clayton and Gertrude Nichols—both of whom were not only depositors but stockholders, in the defunct concern—having been reduced by it from more than, to somewhat less than, one quarter of a million dollars. But, invested in the 'Alice' and other good paying mining properties and several pieces of desirable real estate, there was still a competence for their orphaned child.

Upon Margaret Manning, however, the loss had fallen so much more heavily, that when her affairs had at length been re-adjusted, the pretty, though not costly place at the mountain lake, and the ancestral home, in which she could no longer afford to live, represented the sum total of her worldly possessions, her income being the rental from the home; for several other pieces of valuable property had the noble woman insisted upon turning over to still further swell the shrunken assets of the institution, which had been practically founded by and still bore her honored father's name, to which both his and her husband's short lives had been devoted, and in which the family

had always taken a just pride; to the end that settlement might be made upon a more nearly even basis.

There is seldom, perhaps never, in life, any happening so bad but what worse might have been. While the intense loneliness without her devoted and companionable husband, of course became well nigh unendurable at times, yet the sorrowing woman was greatly comforted by the consciousness that she need not mourn as one without hope; while as for *material* things, Margaret Manning's training had been a blessed rooting and grounding of faith in the declaration of Holy Writ, that 'a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth'; that to *be*, not *have*, marks the truest and highest living. And although it could not, of course, be easy at first for one born, reared, shielded from care and surrounded by comforts, as she had always been, to adapt herself to so restricted and different a manner of life, yet she realized with thankfulness that there still remained enough to insure them a modest living, and counted herself rich indeed while blessed with such a noble son to love, and live for, and soon, indeed, to lean upon; for Robert Manning, now in his teens, was a sturdy, strapping, fine looking boy, of whose physical appearance alone, any parent might well be proud. Mentally—well, he could hardly have been otherwise than bright. In nature he was unselfish, loyal, frank, truthful; unusually manly, yet intensely affectionate, his love for his mother still a passion with him, as it

had ever conspicuously been. His father's death he had taken very deeply to heart, for theirs had been congenial natures, and he was of an age to understand his loss. Its effect had been a markedly subduing one upon the boisterous enthusiasm of earlier days, which from that sad period began to give place to a quiet seriousness of habit and action.

Always a beautiful little singer, Robert was at this age the boy soloist of their church's youthful vested choir; and as the lonely mother, from her near-by pew, would now gaze upon the bright, uplifted face, and hearken to the clear, ringing voice, filling the sacred edifice with its, to her, almost seraphic music, her heart would overflow with pride and gratitude, and from its swelling depths would rise a pleading, oft-repeated:

'Father, he is my only joy;
Protect him, Father, bless my boy!'

CHAPTER II.

GERALD HARDING.

"Too many cooks will spoil the broth; and Gerald had been spoiled; **lamentably** spoiled."

Companions and playmates from infancy, separations between Alice Nichols and Robert Manning had been few, indeed, up to this time; but their mutual dread of one which now confronted them, showed their youthful hearts to be yet animated by a very deeply tender feeling towards each other. The innocently outspoken admiration of the one, and the flattering confidence and homage of the other—of which we have spoken, during their earlier childhood—had never died out; those sentiments had undergone no diminution, but had simply resolved themselves into a more mature, reserved manner of expression, as added years, bringing self-consciousness, had made them sensitive to the notice and remarks of others.

They were now approaching those momentous years, where-in kind Nature, by some subtle, indefinable, mysterious physical change, prepares the human animal for its divine vocation, the propagation of the race; and by this change develops in it romantic love, or love between the sexes. That really beautiful, even though oftentimes awkward bashfulness of intercourse

between a girl and boy, which generally does, and properly should, mark this period, had already begun to manifest itself in theirs; there was the hesitating deference of advance, and the shy though pleased acceptance; the substitution of the more dignified 'Rob', for childish 'Robbie'; and the greater pleasure which now resulted to the athletic lad from a quiet stroll with Alice and her governness, than from a rollicking game with boyish companions; all testifying to the early stirrings of the tender passion.

Upon the vacating of their home for a tenant, Margaret Manning and her son had taken up residence temporarily with Alice and her mother; and as the health of the latter very soon began to fail, they had continued together to the sad end. The budding girl and boy had therefore been *constant* companions, for a period extending over several months in which affliction's hand, so heavily laid upon them both, had knit their emotional young hearts together in that closest of all uniting bonds, the bond of a common sorrow; which now made the thought of parting but the more unwelcome.

The care of the orphaned girl's fortune and person, however, had been entrusted by the dying mother to the paternal uncle who was her only living, near, male relative; and Alice, for her own best good, had therefore been soon lovingly won to consent to a removal from the old associations, which daily, hourly, brought afresh to her mind her irreparable loss; and together

with the devoted Mademoiselle, who had taught her from the days of A-B-C, was soon installed as a member of his household. As we shall follow the future of this sweet, young girl with deep and sympathetic interest, much of our time hereafter will also be spent in the less genial climate of the city by the Lake; where we shall take pleasure in renewing—and let us *hope*—in deepening our acquaintance with Mrs. Nichols and ‘Georgie.’

Now it was not an altogether new experience for this childless couple to be entrusted with the care of an orphaned young relative; although in a former instance the responsibility had been thrust upon them from the other side of the house, and the object had been a boy.

Gerald Harding was a nephew of Mrs. Nichols. He had first opened his eyes to the light of this world in her father’s house, when she herself was at that gushing age—scant fifteen—at which to the average girl a baby is ‘just the *dearest, sweetest, cutest* thing that ever happened. She had not much more than laid aside her dolls when this new, more interesting plaything came along; and she had been most affectionately devoted to the little fellow from the very first. His mother—her eldest sister—had married against her parents’ wishes, very young and hastily; and poor girl! she had lived to sadly rue it. After several years of great unhappiness, she had been obliged to leave her cruel, faithless husband; yet she had *loved*

him so, this handsome, ardent, fascinating wooer, that, utterly broken in spirit, with the pangs of disappointed hope gnawing like canker into her soul, by the time the child had reached his seventh year she had actually grieved her life away. Mr. and Mrs. Nichols had then taken little Gerald to bring him up; and had he been their own, love could hardly have been deeper, and care certainly no tenderer. A few months later, his paternal grandfather—dying virtually heart-broken, also, because of the disgraceful escapades of his wayward son—over his head had bequeathed to the little grandson a snug fortune, with Mr. George Nichols as custodian. Liberal allowance from it had been made for maintenance and education while the child was growing up; but that no idle or vicious habits be engendered by easy money too young, also to prevent the father's wheedling it away from him in part or whole during early manhood should he ever come under his influence, Gerald was not to have control until he should have reached the age of thirty. A wise precaution, but one which proved to have been needless as far as the elder was concerned, as the wasted, worthless life went out in an orgy of dissipation a very few years later, bringing relief, if not positive joy to the entire family.

As a baby, Gerald Harding would assuredly have taken the prize at any show; for he was one of those cherubic, curly-headed little darlings, with big, wondering brown eyes, dimpled chin and the rosiest of

cheeks, whom strangers invariably stopped to look at and admire. Friends, who knew, called him the miniature of his father, in one breath, and regretted the resemblance in the next; for, said they, he'll probably grow up the same perfect Adonis, and Fred Harding's good looks have been his ruination; that, and having a father who was too good a thing.

But the child had not only inherited the personal characteristics of his progenitor; his intensely selfish nature, as well, had entered into his unfortunate offspring; and selfishness we hold to be the root of every undesirable and evil inclination in mankind. As one has aptly put it, 'If *self* the wavering balance shake, 'tis seldom well adjusted.' This undesirable trait, moreover, the child's unusual rearing had fostered; for he had been brought up by a mother—whose lonely, sorrowing heart had been most inordinately wrapped up in her child—doting grand-parents, and proudly indulgent uncles and aunts galore; and being a lusty-lunged, persistent little tyrant, full also of subtly cunning, coaxing ways, whatever he might have set his heart upon getting he was sure to get. 'Too many cooks will spoil the broth,' and Gerald had been spoiled; *lamentably* spoiled. We say lamentably—pardon the iteration—for it is always a calamity when a child has been spoiled. In view of all this, even in one much more promisingly sired than he had been, the weeds and tares might very easily have choked out the good seed. The worthy intentions of his aunt and

uncle to lead the child into better ways when they assumed control, had been about as discouragingly unsuccessful as laudable. 'One cannot gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles'; and this twig, sprung from predominatingly bad seed, had, in addition, been bent in an adverse direction for so long a time, that the tree was most unfavorably inclined.

Now, boys are like vinegar, they say; the more mother there is in them the better they are. Admitting that there are exceptions to all rules, Gerald's case was emphatically no exception to this one; had there been more of Bertha Adams and less of Frederick Harding in his composition, our accounts of him would unquestionably have been much more creditable and pleasurable ones to chronicle. The coachman's description of the lad at the age of twelve, presents us with a true though very uncomplimentary portrait of him at that time. Complaining of his annoying conduct to Mr. Nichols one day, when thoroughly out of patience with his troublesome pranks, he had ended thus: "Beggin' yer pardon, Sor, 'taint no use yer tryin' ter make honything o' that ther kid, h'im afeered; 'e's likely enough, Sor, but 'e's jist nat'ally *too bloomin' bad*."

It was true as the man had said; Gerald *was* 'likely', and fortunately so; for in spite of lack of application, his education had progressed not unfavorably, owing to his bright mind, readiness to acquire knowledge, and the possession of a most excellent

memory. Had it been otherwise, he must have grown up an ignoramus indeed; for discipline was so obnoxious to him, that his school life—to college he would not go—had been a succession of deserved suspensions and expulsions.

But though the boy was selfish, he was not stingy; a surplus of anything beyond his own wants, be it what it may, he would scatter with a lavish hand; and generally having abundance and to spare, thus gained quite an enviable reputation for generosity. Possessing no real depth of character, he was always ready for mischievous fun, in season and out, and growing to youth and young manhood 'a jolly good fellow,' made many acquaintances, but governed by the assumption that these were valueless unless usable, formed no warm or lasting friendships.

According to early promise, the *child* developed into an exceptionally handsome *man*, both as to form and face; and to the end of his days, never lost that child-like innocence of the eye, which might have deceived even the Devil, himself. He had all the natural grace of manner of a Chesterfield, and the perfect taste of a Brummel in dress; sang well, danced distractingly, and being well connected and with time and some money to spend, was a favorite with the girls; many of whom fawned upon and flattered him, and thus contributed successfully to the further spoiling of him.

Like his unworthy sire, utterly selfish and lacking absolutely in sincerity or stability, he became one of

that detestable species, the male flirt. His burning, compelling love-making—of which the reader shall later judge—would melt a heart of ice; but the pleasure of the game ended for him with conquest; and he would at once begin to lay about for some way of being 'off with the old love', that he might be 'on with the new'; so that, shy of twenty-five when we first meet him, he had already been the hero (?) of several love affairs; once even being threatened with suit for breach of promise.

As far as it was possible for him to love anybody but himself, however, Gerald Harding certainly did love his Aunt Alice; that seemed his one redeeming trait. And well he might; for truly she had loved him with a mother's love. Her patience with the trying boy, her devotion to him, her encouraging pride in his ability and achievements, her sorrow over his misdeeds, were beautiful and remarkable. And waves of grateful recognition of her goodness to him would seem to sweep over the youth periodically, apparently bringing with them the desire and determination to be more worthy of it all; when for a little, his conduct would be all that the most exacting could wish; and telling of the latent *possibilities* for good within him, would make one but the sadder to see these so held in thrall by the selfish weakness of his nature.

As to mental bent, Gerald was an artist; another inheritance from the father, whose profession it had been, and in which his unusual ability could have ele-

vated the man to the highest ranks, had he but willed. From the time the little fingers could hold and manipulate a pencil or bit of chalk, Gerald could draw; and his caricatures had attracted notice from his early childhood; in fact, the making his teachers or professors the subjects of them had constantly brought him into disrepute at school. An artist then the youth decided to be, and seemed fortunately so in love with his chosen calling as to become imbued with a deep ambition to excel in it; so that, when he had given to his art studies willing, patient and industrious attention, his relatives were encouraged to hope that a career worthy of his extraordinary talent was yet possible; that the nobler attributes of his nature were about to assert themselves and make a real man of him after all. He studied for a time at home, later at Boston, and for a year before our introduction to him had been under the very best Parisian instruction.

In the care of their foster-child, Mr. Nichols had been no less zealous and tender in the performance of duty than his wife; and after the long and wearing guardianship of Gerald, that of Alice seemed to come to them more as a direct reward for patient, faithful service, than as a charge. Their fondness for the winsome child had always been inordinate; Mrs. Nichols, beside affection, feeling a sort of proprietary interest in her little namesake; and the uncle, because that she was Clayton's child; to whom, the reader will remember, Mr. Nichols had been not only a loving elder

brother, but a devoted father as well. What with their love, then, extravagant fondness and sympathetic longing and endeavors to compensate as far as possible for her cruel loss, the girl's environment was certainly an ideal one for the spoiling of any ordinary disposition.

But, as we have seen, Alice Nichols was endowed in equal measure with that same beautiful nature in which forgetfulness of self, and gratitude, predominate, which had made of her charming mother an object of such universal love, and which made it an impossibility for the girl to become in the smallest degree, selfish or thoughtless of others. Even in the early freshness of her overpowering grief, thankful appreciation of their efforts to interest and cheer her would hold in check the almost uncontrollable outbursts of grief in presence of the family, and she would wait, with truly pathetic fortitude, to sob out her heartaches in the seclusion of her own room, upon the bosom of loving and dearly loved Mam'selle.

But 'when the stream which overflowed the soul had passed away, leaving upon the silent shores of memory images and precious thoughts which should not die and could not be destroyed,' Alice, becoming engrossed in the duties and associations of her new life and surroundings, found in them a healing balm, and life once more held happiness for her, as was right. For as the tender, flexible sapling, bowing and bending to earth beneath the storm, springs quickly back and again lifts

its undaunted head when the fury of the tempest has been spent, so a beneficent Creator has also wisely and lovingly implanted in the youthful human heart, so much of elasticity and adaptiveness, that the crushing weights of affliction and sorrow do but bend, not break it.

Returning the tender love of both her guardians with a deep and grateful affection, towards her uncle this soon developed into a positive passion; the wealth of love which she had borne her deceased father seeming to be transferred to him; and *had the need arose, we doubt not the girl would cheerfully have given her life for his.*

Thus, uneventfully, the years slipped by; not the least happy weeks of which—we have the girl's own assurance for—were those passed *each Summer* at the *Lake*; enjoying the prized companionship of 'Dear Mamma Manning' and 'Dear Rob'; as the weekly letters to her old friends and ours were unvaryingly headed; beside also the delightful *Winter* holiday seasons of their separation which they had always spent together; some in Denver and some in Chicago.

CHAPTER III.

YOUTHFUL LOVERS.

"'Why we've **always** loved each other. At least, **I** have **you**; and **you** have **me**, too; haven't you, sweetheart?'"

Now although it seems but yesterday since these two dear children, fresh from the hand of God, slipped through the heavenly portals and made their advent into this troublous world, yet the swiftly passing years have followed each other in such rapid succession that youth is already upon them—

That blest Springtime of life—so brief—
When pulses maddening thrill;
When song and mirth and spendthrift love,
The heart's deep chambers fill.

Today we have them before us, the one a nearly six-foot, manly-hearted chap, just past eighteen; the other a slender, graceful girl, but a few months his junior; and we exclaim involuntarily, How short is life! how fleeting time!

We see them now standing upon the threshold of maturer years, and extravagantly happy in the consciousness of being all in all to each other. 'Premature

at such an age,' do you say? Well, for that matter, reader, in ordinary cases, we, too, hold to the same conservative opinion as your own upon this weighty subject. But kindly bear in mind that theirs was *not exactly* an ordinary case. True, this is but the record of two commonplace lives; yet we have learned that these lives were not projected into being under altogether commonplace influences, while some, at least, of the happenings in them, had also been considerably out of the ordinary; and 'circumstances alter cases.'

The early sentimental revelation had come about very simply and unexpectedly. They were in the midst of one of their delightful Summers together at the Lake, and upon one particular day had been enjoying a short after-luncheon loll in the hammocks upon the lawn at the Nichols' place, when who should come cantering gaily up the graveled walk, unannounced, but Gerald Harding, who had been absent from home for several years, and was by now settled into a very sedate looking fellow of twenty-seven.

"Why, my *dear boy!* what brought *you* here!" exclaimed his aunt, with surprised delight; jumping hastily up and rushing forward with beaming face and outstretched arms, to welcome her handsome nephew and foster-child.

"Oh, the usual means of transportation in such cases, Auntie; steamer, cars and pony," promptly replied the newcomer; vaulting lightly to the ground

while he spoke, and returning his aunt's affectionate greeting with equal fervor.

"There, there, you naughty boy!" said Mrs. Nichols, laughingly, "you know what I mean; what was the cause, the *raison d'être* of your coming over at this particular time"?

"Well, 'if the mountain won't go to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain,' you know, Auntie. When you disappointed me about coming over this Summer, I got so *utterly homesick* to see you—*honor bright* I did, Auntie," he vowed, in protest of her skeptically surprised look—"that my friends, all noticing how thin I was getting, though without knowing the cause, recommended a rest and change; which advice I decided was good enough to follow; so here I am. Say I don't love you now? Glad to see me, Auntie?" he finished, effusively kissing the woman a second time.

"Am I *glad*? Why, my dear boy, I'm simply *delighted*; this is the happiest surprise I've had for many a long day," replied Mrs. Nichols, with a warm pressure of the shapely hands, that she found sincere pleasure in holding once again. "Your Uncle George will be glad to see you, too; he brought me home a very gratifying report of you last year. Alice! Rob!" she called, excitedly, "here's Gerald!" for they were, of course, all acquainted.

"But how is my good Uncle?" asked the young man, with a show of deep interest, as he shook hands with the others—gently detaining that of the girl, as if un-

consciously—"I trust he's fully recovered from his indisposition of a few months back. And why didn't you come over this Summer as you promised, Auntie, and bring my charming cousin"? he added. And as he spoke, a look of the most undisguised and flattering admiration was fixed upon the blushing girl, ere he released her hand; even then doing this with evident reluctance.

"Your Uncle is improving some all the time now, I think, Gerald, although yet far from his former self; his condition was really critical for a good while, and a European trip was not to be thought of in his state. But don't say 'promised', my dear boy," corrected his aunt; "I'm sure we didn't do that. I believe I *did* write early in the year that we would *like* to come, and *might*; but——"

"But what?" queried the other, as her remarks came to an abrupt ending.

"Well, candidly," replied Mrs. Nichols, "we found that our dear little girl here"—tenderly drawing Alice to her side as she spoke—"had her heart so set upon coming West, as usual, that we couldn't think of disappointing her. This is a very precious spot to Alice, you know, Gerald," she concluded, with feeling.

"O, Auntie dear"! broke in the young girl, deprecatingly, "you shouldn't have deprived yourselves of the pleasure of a visit to Gerald on my account; I wouldn't have had it so for anything, if I had known"; at the same time kissing her aunt in loving appreciation of the unselfish act.

"We were well aware of that, dearie; so, if you remember, we never referred to the subject a second time. But it's just as well now, you see; for Gerald's coming over has shown me that there's a very warm place in his heart, yet, for his auntie, and such knowledge of course makes me exceedingly happy. We'll go over next year, after you're through school; we can stay longer then, too.

"But you must be *very* tired, my dear boy, and even more hungry, perhaps," continued their aunt, turning again to her nephew. "Let's to the house and see what cook has in the larder";—as she slipped her arm lovingly in his—"Rob will be pleased to hand your horse over to John for you, I know."

Now some people in this world seem especially born *to* trouble, others to *make* trouble; and Gerald Harding belonged unmistakably in the latter category. His nature had not in any way improved; years had but taught him the advisability and wisdom of concealing his glaring selfishness under varying cloaks; yet it was still Gerald Harding, first, last, and always, with him, as of yore. His unexpected visit home at this time was not precipitated by that unquenchable longing to see his foster-mother—of which he had so unblushingly told, and which the fond, deceived soul took such delight in believing—but simply and solely for the purpose of meeting and studying the now charming niece—naturally a frequent subject of remark in the letters from his aunt—who, when he had last seen her, was a

sweet and pretty, though somewhat angular and extremely bashful girl of fifteen. For Gerald, like the average man, had now arrived at an age when he felt disposed to look about him for a wife. Alice, so he had learned, was beautiful, accomplished, had money, and beside a host of other desirable attributes, was possessed of an *angelic* disposition; 'which latter'—the man was sufficiently honest to confide to himself—'the wife of Gerald Harding will most certainly need.'

To Alice then his fancy turned, notwithstanding his full cognizance of the fact that by their relatives, at least, she and Robert Manning had always been intended for each other; and once his mind was made up and bent upon the acquisition of any particular thing, Gerald became impatient of delay, as well as most persistent in the accomplishment of his purpose. Disappointed, as we have learned, as to their aunt and 'Cousin Alice'—as he now proceeded for the first time to familiarly call her—coming to Paris, he had decided to cross the pond himself; and finding the amiable young girl decidedly to his liking, was by no means backward in his attentions, making but little pretense of seeking the society of the young ladies of the camp, but devoting himself most assiduously and conspicuously to her.

It will be remembered that at this time, Alice Nichols was yet a schoolgirl; not in society. Robert Manning being virtually the only member of the opposite sex from whom she was in the habit of receiving any gal-

lant attentions, he had therefore enjoyed a monopoly of her company; and until Gerald, with his open admiration and *devoirs* appeared upon the scene, the youth's tranquility and peace of mind had been undisturbed as to thoughts of rivals. In fact it was a subject about which there had seemed no need or room for thought. To his mind, Alice was simply *his*; always had been, always would be; just as he was *hers*. But when a realization of the dread possibility of another aspiring to and perchance winning her love, was borne in upon his mind and heart, its sickening presence brought with it also immediate alarm; for the lad then fully understood how unspeakably precious that love was to him, how absolutely necessary to his life's happiness.

Now as we have already seen him pictured, Gerald Harding was an unusually handsome fellow; he was beside, full of that pleasing, indolent grace of manner which marks the well-bred man—also the treacherous cat. He had been about, seen considerable of the world, had a bright mind, and that happy faculty of the good conversationalist, the knack of imparting information in an easy, engrossing, entertaining way. He of course exerted himself to the utmost now to please, was unselfishness, gentleness and kindness personified, not only with the girl but with all. Mrs. Nichols was *charmed* with the change and improvement in his ways; Alice, like any girl of her age under such influence, was in a way, fascinated. Had

their aunt have detected any indication of her impressionable young heart succumbing to what *she* understood to be, at least, a superficial attack upon it, she would have felt concern at once, notwithstanding her nephew's seeming reformation; for she was so truly fond of her lovely niece as to be extremely solicitous for her welfare.

Robert need have felt no uneasiness, however, for never for a moment was the heart of Alice Nichols drawn in the slightest degree towards Gerald Harding. But Robert *was* uneasy, though, for a time, battling right manfully—for one of his age—against his jealous fears, he strove to ignore the 'unheard-of presumption of his rival'—as he indignantly classed both it, and him—and bravely endeavored to offset any possibly disastrous consequences of the other's studied attentions to the girl, by a greater, counter devotion. The honest, callow youth, however, was no match in love affairs for this heartless, experienced man of the world; whose whetted appetite, moreover, was but spurred on to greater activity by the instantly recognized fact of opposition.

When Robert, at last, could no longer ignore, he fretted and fumed and sulked by turns, in genuinely childish fashion; a little of this, and he was prepared to distrust the girl, even; almost succeeding in convincing himself that she had ceased to care for him, and life, in that event, he decided, was no longer worth the living. 'If Alice should see his dead body

floating upon the surface of the lake'—he would muse, tragically, as he paced its banks in moody solitariness, while the object of his gloomy soliloquy was perhaps off for a stroll at the urgent invitation of their guest—'she would perhaps realize what she had driven him to, and be sorry. But then there was Mamma, and he couldn't think of that. No, he must bear it like a man; Alice was trifling with his affections though, and he would put a stop to that; she must choose between them.'

So the unsuspecting girl was accordingly invited to take an early morning ride; at that most glorious hour in the mountains, which Gerald, both from natural inclination and a foreign-imbibed custom, always idled away in sleep.

'Morn amid the mountains! lovely Solitude!'

when more than at any other hour of the day, the eternal, immovable hills, the trickling cascades, the tumbling waterfalls, the gushing streams, the gentle zephyrs whispering so mysteriously together among the tree-tops, the chirping birds, the whirring insects, *all* seem prating of constancy and love; conspiring together to draw the soul of the thoughtful beholder 'through Nature, up to Nature's God'; the Great *Heart* of love.

Verily, the time seemed a peculiarly sweet, well chosen, and even typical one, in which for these two dear young creatures, just at the dawn of a new epoch, to allow the well-rooted germ of love within them to

burst forth into palpitating life, and flood each other's hearts with its enlightening and vivifying radiance, stirring their unexplored depths to new and rapturous activity; as the glad Sun, breaking, wakes even the deepest vales to the light and joy of a new day.

'Twas an ideal setting, and O! what a pretty picture they made for it, as they went loping along together side by side, so evenly and gracefully—they had been broken to the saddle when mere babies, if we may so express it—drinking in the fragrance and exhilarating freshness of the early morning; the almost infantile fairness of the girl—she was a counterpart of her dainty mother—brought out so strikingly by the black broadcloth habit that she wore, and by contrast with the dark complexion of her manly escort. Their happy, innocent faces—happy *because* innocent—reflecting in them all the joyousness and beauty of the scene about.

They were in an atmosphere of trust and gladness; and laughing and chatting gaily as they rode along, Robert's jealous fears and doubts were lulled to rest, by the magic influence of the time and place and prized companionship, and his unpleasant errand clean forgotten; until Alice, slowing down, remarked innocently, "We mustn't go too far, Rob, for Cousin Gerald wants to make a sketch of me this morning; he's taking one of each of us back with him, you know, to grace his apartments; so he flatteringly tells us," she finished, with a light laugh.

Click! Her words had fallen like the sharp snapping of the hammer upon the cap; igniting the powder, exploding the charge, and until the smoke had cleared away, projecting a disfiguring blur upon the tranquil beauty of the morning.

"Cousin Gerald, indeed!" repeated her companion, scornfully; an angry frown instantly darkening his hitherto smiling face. "Why, he's no relation of yours, Alice, and I wouldn't be so familiar if I was in your place!" And with a determined, almost vicious jerk, the youth brought his horse to a standstill as he spoke; the girl, along-side, instantly drawing rein also.

She was *thunder-struck*. Reproofs of any sort she was not accustomed to from any one—she neither needed nor deserved them—but to receive one from *Robert*, this was a blow indeed. It was not that he had said so much, as the bitter way in which he had said it. Hot tears sprang to her eyes, but she forced them back, and said, quietly, though with unconcealed surprise, "Why, Rob; what makes you speak like that? Of course I know that Gerald's no relation of mine, but he is of Aunt Alice, and it seems so all in the family, sort of, that I don't see where the harm is in my calling him cousin."

"No particular harm, perhaps, Alice," returned the youth, loftily; "but it sounds very silly to my way of thinking, and is decidedly out of place and unbecoming as well."

"But he called me Cousin Alice, first, you know,

Rob, and *wants* me to call him Cousin Gerald; so why shouldn't I"? persisted the girl, gently.

"O, very well, Alice; if his opinions and wishes are of more consequence to you than mine, why I've nothing more to say," replied the jealous youth, with a great show of offended dignity. Then, with a quick assumption of pretended indifference, added, "If you care more for him than you do for me, why I'd like to know it; that's all; it's one and the same to m—— No! No! Alice! No! No! I don't mean that!" he protested frantically, as a smothered sob smote upon his ear; turning also like a flash at the same time, and flinging his arm about the girl—he had been obliged to keep his face averted from her as he uttered the cruel words, which, in his heart, he felt to be suicidal—"I mean that it would *kill* me! *that's* what I mean! O, Alice, believe me, and please forgive me for hurting you so!" he finished, penitently.

"Of course I forgive you, Rob," returned the sweet girl, heartily; now smiling through her tears. "But it seems the strangest thing in the world to me that you should take exception to such a *simple* thing as Gerald and I calling each other cousin."

"Perhaps I *had* no *real* right, to Alice, but——"

"O, I didn't mean upon that account, Rob!" interrupted the other, "but because it seems a thing of absolutely no importance whatever to *me*. It don't mean anything, you know."

"Pardon my contradicting, Alice, but it does mean

something, and a good big something, too; at least, as far as Gerald's concerned. It means that he's dead in love with you, Alice; that's just what it means! Anybody blind in one eye and with no use of the other, could see *that!*"

"Nonsense, Rob! I'm only a child to Gerald; why he's twenty-seven!"

"I know he is, Alice; therefore he should devote himself to the young ladies of the place who are nearer his own age," the youth replied, with much spirit. "There's any number of them here, and most of them would be only too willing, judging from the ridiculous way they tag around after him. But no; he must monopolize *you*," he continued gloomily. "Why, I haven't seen anything of you at all, hardly, since *he* came, Alice."

"Why, Rob, you've seen me every day," corrected the girl, smiling. "Of course, I've had to divide my company between you more or less, for he's our guest, you know, and naturally, I'm expected to do my share towards entertaining him. Common politeness, Rob, would forbid my refusing to ride or drive or row or walk with him when asked to do so; especially when there's no other young person in the house. But I'm quite sure you're mistaken as to his sentiments towards me; and really, Rob, I didn't think you could be so ungenerous. Why, you heard him tell Aunt Alice, *distinctly*, that he came over because he was so homesick to see *her*; and I think that was just *perfectly*

lovely of him. She brought him up, you know; and I'm sure he's disappointed, too, at not being able to see more of her than he does; but you know how absolutely devoted she is to poor Uncle George, and it seems to make him so nervous and irritable somehow—together unlike himself—to have Gerald with them very much, that he's *obliged* to spend more of his time with me, you see."

"Which is evidently no great hardship for him," sniffed her companion, promptly. "I don't want to be ungenerous, as you call it, Alice, but just the same, I can't believe all I hear when it comes from Gerald Harding"; with a doubting nod. "I admit, I don't really *know* anything against him, but there's something about him that I don't like; I feel suspicious of him all the time, and I'd rather see you *dead* than married to him. It won't be *his* fault though if you're not, some day," persisted the youth, "for I *know* he's in love with you."

"Well, then you certainly know a whole lot more than I do about it, Rob, for Gerald's never told me so; he always talks to me on such nice, interesting subjects.

"Wouldn't it be a '*nice, interesting*' subject if he talked to you of love, Alice?" queried her companion eagerly; and with an utterly incredulous air which it was impossible for him to conceal.

"No, it would *not*," replied the girl, decidedly. "I should become *ennuyé* at once."

"Then you think love an uninteresting subject, Alice?" he returned.

"I didn't say so, Rob."

"But you just said that you would become wearied, at once, if Gerald talked to you on it."

"Which wasn't necessarily to say that the subject itself would be an uninteresting one, Rob; was it?" returned the girl, *shyly*. And then, quickly lowering her eyes from his, she fixed her gaze, with apparently a most intense absorption, upon the meanderings of a fly that crawled lazily up and down her horse's nose.

"Would it be an uninteresting subject if I talked to you on it, Alice"? asked Robert, at this; softly, and with a bit of hesitation, although once more placing an arm lovingly about his companion's waist.

"It *might* not be, Rob," replied this young daughter of Eve, coyly, with still lowered head.

"Well, I've never said anything to you about love in so many words, Alice," broke out Robert, now feeling encouraged to speak boldly, 'because it didn't seem necessary for me to; our case is *so different* to the average one, you know. Why, we've *always* loved each other; at least, *I* have *you*; and *you* have *me*, *too*, haven't you, sweetheart?" he urged, wistfully; raising the blushing face, and finding the confession he sought in the now glowing, love-lit eyes, which smiled with such perfect sincerity and happiness up into his own. "Of course, I've always expected you to be my wife when we get a little older," he went on

to say, "and until Gerald came, I had never thought of such a thing as any one's taking you from me. I can stand his loving you, though, if you wont return it; but I couldn't stand it if you did, Alice; *really* I couldn't, for my heart's been bound up in you *too long* and *too completely* for that. I *think* it would *kill* me; but if it didn't quite do that, it would *change* me so that I would be far better dead; I can *feel* that it would, Alice; that I should *never* be the same again," acknowledged the youth; with almost frightening intensity and earnestness. "So tell me that you *don't* care for him," he pleaded.

"No, Rob, I *don't* love Gerald, or any one else but you," whispered the girl, with a sweet and most satisfying assurance. Why do you suppose, for a moment, that I ever *could* love another, when, as every one knows, I've *worshipped* you all my life?"

"Then promise me, sweetheart, that you won't let Gerald take you away from me; that you'll wait for me," begged the youth; a deep, unwonted pathos now thrilling his strong, young voice. "I'm studying real hard, Alice, and it won't be so very many years more before I'm through and admitted to the bar, and then see if I don't make a name for you of which you can well be proud; and a fortune, too," he concluded, confidently.

"I know I shall always have cause to be proud of you, Rob," replied the girl, with as much confidence as himself; "and even if you never succeeded in

making a fortune, it wouldn't matter, for I shall have enough for us both. Gerald hasn't the least thought of wanting to take me from you, Rob; I'm positive of that. But if he had, I wouldn't let him. Of course, this isn't a regular engagement, with a ring, announcement Tea and all that, but I'll wait for you just the same as if it was, Rob; of that you can rest assured; and what is more, I shall never be *fully* happy, either, until I come back again to dear Mamma Manning and you."

"You've taken an *awful* load from my heart, Alice," returned the relieved youth, gratefully; sealing her comforting assurance and flattering confession with their first kiss of acknowledged love. "I've been so miserable the past few weeks, that I've been tempted to do all manner of dreadful things," he went on. "Why, I was never so unhappy in all my life, Alice."

Don't smile, reader, at what may appear to you—inexperienced perhaps, or else more experienced, and therefore satiated and inured—his childish acknowledgment. Remember, that Robert Manning was a *life-long lover* and an *utterly devoted* one; and while a boy's heart *may* be more easily mended than a man's, it also suffers more easily and acutely.

"You haven't acted one bit like yourself, either, Rob," returned the girl, seriously, "and I couldn't imagine what was the matter with you. Why, you've been actually *grumpy* much of the time, and when anybody's grumpy, Aunt Alice always attributes it to

a torpid liver; so I had about concluded that your liver must be torpid."

"I don't think it was a torpid liver, Alice," now laughed the relieved young lover, gaily, "and I'm dead sure of one thing; it was *anything* but a *torpid heart*."

CHAPTER IV.

GERALD'S DISTURBING AVOWAL.

"I have to confess to an extravagant fondness for the witching little beauty, myself."

Vacations were over. Alice, finishing at Geneva Lake, as had her aunt, had returned and entered upon her last year there. Robert—whose intended course at Harvard had become impracticable through their altered circumstances—had matriculated at the excellent University of his native State; entering with records both for scholarship and athletics which left him without a rival among the large enrollment of Freshmen upon its register; while in addition to the college curriculum, the youth had also taken up the reading of law outside; against the advice of his professors, and notwithstanding the mother's fears that it might prove too great a tax upon the strength of the yet growing lad. But both in mind and body, Robert Manning was fortunately able for much of hard work, with a fancy for it, as well; and now, carrying about with him, as he did, the inspiring consciousness of a returned love to fire him with the ambition to complete the preparation for his life work in the shortest possible time, the constant application to study which the two entailed, seemed more recreation than tasks to the enthusiastic young student.

Gerald Harding had gone back to work; *his* studies were of course completed, and he was now becoming known to Paris as one of her cleverest young cartoonists. This, his chosen branch of Art, the young man was, as we have seen, particularly well fitted for by nature, and to his credit be it said, he had been both diligent and painstaking in his preparation; so that he was now beginning to reap the merited reward of industry. His efforts were meeting with encouraging recognition; his productions not only finding a market, but the leading journals of his adopted city were already entering into, at least, a mild competition for their possession. He was in consequence beginning to prosper, becoming anxious for a wife, Alice Nichols was unfortunately his choice, and he was desperately infatuated with the girl.

Had he declared himself to her during those few delightful weeks together at the Lake, do you ask? No, reader; knowing what he did, none but a bungling amateur could have been guilty of so egregious a *faux pas* as that; and *he* was a past master in the gentle art of love-making, was this latter-day Don Juan. Moreover, it was not for the purpose of making love to any girl that he had come sailing home at that particular time, you remember, but from affectionate longing after his devoted foster-mother, if you please. This worthy (?) act, however, had 'killed two birds with one stone,' as it were, for the pretender, since it had won for him the high regard of the girl; a point

which he considered himself fortunate to have scored, and there had been others, too, gained by his entertaining qualities; for Gerald was an intelligent fellow, and she herself has stated that he talked to her on 'nice, interesting subjects'. Of such the man had a very creditable supply, even when confining himself strictly to the truth; which it must be admitted, however, he was not always careful to do, having no conscientious scruples, whatever, against handling the truth a bit carelessly, if thereby he might make or clinch a telling point.

Now the thrilling, mature experiences of *masculine* twenty-seven, read much like ancient history to inexperienced, wondering *feminine* eighteen; and Youth feels ever a sort of reverence for that which savors of the larger wisdom of accumulated years. Hence, the flattering way in which this young girl would frequently hang upon the utterances of this young man, spoke volumes, as well for the interesting nature of the subject matter as for the narrator's fascinating delivery.

Thus, deeply pleased with himself at having become so well established in her good opinions in so short a time, Gerald Harding was quite content to let well enough alone, and not alarm the unsuspecting and somewhat charmed bird to irrecoverable flight, by any too sudden or ill-advised swoop. For he was a wise person in such matters; 'wise as the serpent'; would that we were able to tell of him also as being 'harmless as the dove'.

He had parted from Alice, however, with genuine and unconcealed regret, upon her return to school, and ere he bade their aunt adieu, a few days later, had unburdened to her his heart; a very graceful opportunity for this confession having arisen through her lamenting of the girl's absence. "I shall be so glad when Alice is at home with us again," she had said, "for we have missed her so dreadfully while at school; she's such a *darling* that your uncle and I simply *adore* her."

"I don't wonder at that, Auntie, for I have to confess to an extravagant fondness for the witching little beauty, myself," put in the lover, quickly.

"Not too much of an one, I hope, Gerald," returned his aunt, thoughtfully; with something very like alarm in her expression.

"No, I think not," responded her nephew, coolly, "for I'm sure you'll agree with me, that a fellow *can't* be too fond of the girl he intends having for a wife; can he?"

"Of course he can't; but you really mustn't harbor any such intentions as that in regard to Alice, my dear boy," answered Mrs. Nichols, decidedly, "for she's already spoken for; heavily mortgaged, as they say," she finished, with a light laugh.

"Why, is that so?" replied the other, with a show of blankest surprise. "Who to, pray?"

"Why, to Rob Manning."

"What! *that kid!*" returned the man; a note of

mild scorn accompanying the exclamation. "Why, Auntie, you surely wouldn't marry the girl to a child, like him! Give her to a man!"

"Robert's an exceptionally manly and capable boy for his years, Gerald," said Mrs. Nichols, with gentle reproof in her tone; "and of course, they're not likely to marry until both are older. But they've always been intended for each other; you surely couldn't have forgotten about that, Gerald."

"Now you recall it, Auntie," drawled her nephew, carelessly, "I *do* seem to have a hazy recollection of hearing some sort of a yarn to that effect, years ago. But you certainly don't advocate binding children by matrimonial compacts made between their parents! Do you? Why, that's French; Chinese; anything but American! That kind of thing won't go down in *this* enlightened country."

"There was no 'compact,' as you call it, made between the parents in this case, Gerald; it was simply a most ardent wish upon their parts that their children might grow up sufficiently fond of each other to *want* to marry; and that wish certainly seems likely to be realized, for Alice and Robert love each other very dearly, I think," declared the lady.

"Pooh! puppy love, Aunt Alice!" put in her nephew, contemptuously. "As base an imitation of the *grande passion* as paste gems are of the real thing. Filled with such notions on the subject as they've been brought up on, of course, they naturally think it's the

proper thing and expected of them, to vow undying love for each other; and they'd go as 'lambs to the slaughter,' no doubt, if some one didn't interfere, and ten to one, live a perfect cat-and-dog life ever after"; he continued, pityingly. "How should either of those children know whether the other is the *one* person in the world for them, I'd like to know? Why, Auntie, it would be positively cruel to allow them to go ahead and marry without giving them a chance to find out. Come now, don't you really think so yourself?"

"By *all* means, Gerald," was the unhesitating reply; "and as I said, they've several years before them yet in which to fully learn their own minds; Robert has at least four years of study ahead of him; Alice finishes next Summer, and in the Fall I shall bring her out. Once in Society, the girl's sure to have hosts of admirers, and if she finds herself getting to love any one else more than she does Rob, why the thing would be called off, no doubt, by mutual consent; there's no binding engagement as yet, you understand; at least, I *think* not. I fancy it would go very hard with Rob, though, if Alice ever *should* become enamored of anybody else. I really pitied the boy from the bottom of my heart, this Summer, after *you* came; why, he was simply *beside* himself in a little while,"—"but I was beside the girl," chuckled her nephew, gleefully, to himself—"and I was *extremely* sorry, Gerald, that you paid such open court to Alice, on his account."

"O pshaw, Auntie! 'all's fair in war and love', you

know," returned the man, lightly. "They're free-for-all games in which the strongest wins; and whoever enters the lists must expect to give and take. I know I made the lovesick young swain that miserably jealous, *dozens* of times, that he wanted to annihilate me on the spot; and it was great sport for me, I assure you, Auntie; haven't enjoyed anything so much in a dog's age," he continued, with a heartless, reminiscent laugh. Adding, as a look of protest clouded the face of his companion, "Do him good, Auntie! help to make a man of him! after his heart's been broken a few times, it won't be so blame sensitive."

"It pains me greatly to hear you speak like that, Gerald," chided his Aunt. "It's so lacking in sympathy; and one should at least regret causing another pain, and avoid the offense, if possible, beside. Knowing Robert's expectations, and how dear Alice is to him, you were hardly warranted in giving rein to your affection; if indeed it *was* affection," she concluded; as though in doubt even upon that point.

Piqued at the evident distrust of his motives which her words betokened, Gerald answered in an aggrieved tone, "I'm very sorry and surprised, too, Aunt Alice, that you should think me capable of trifling with the girl. It seems to me you should know me better than to have such a poor opinion of me as that," he finished, with a great air of injured innocence.

"Pardon me, my dear boy, if I did you an injustice," offered the other, apologetically. "Yet you can

scarcely wonder at my feeling somewhat exercised, even skeptical on the subject, considering your many *previous affairs d'amour*, Gerald."

"O those were all childish matters, Aunt Alice, before I knew my own mind," replied the man, with an impatient gesture. "Fortunately, I was smart enough to wiggle out of them all before it was too late; otherwise I might have turned out a bad husband, and disgraced the family."

"It would have been still better to have *kept* out of them in the first place, Gerald," protested his Aunt, mildly.

"Didn't hurt me a bit, Auntie; good experience for a fellow." The man laughed.

"Yes; but what about the poor girls, Gerald? It was of *them*, I was thinking."

"O it's every man for himself in this world, Auntie"; returned her nephew, with an unfeeling shrug. "I couldn't be expected to worry about *them*; had my mind and hands full enough managing to get *myself* out of the blamed scrapes, the Lord knows! It was their misfortune to have been born with too susceptible natures, that's all; and I guess none of them ever broke their hearts over the affairs, anyway."

"And how am I to know that this latest one isn't a 'childish matter,' also? If it is, and Alice got to loving you, *her* heart would be at least *one* that you had broken; that's sure."

"You know it isn't a childish matter, because I'm a

man, now, Auntie, and doesn't the Good Book say that when one becomes a man he puts away childish things? That's good enough authority, isn't it? You pious folks seem to think it is on most subjects,' concluded her nephew, flippantly.

"The Bible is nowhere authority for any such broad statement," replied Mrs. Nichols, with much dignity. "*Some men never* get beyond being children. And, Gerald," she continued, very reprovingly, "I *do* wish you would try to overcome that unworthy habit of jesting at sacred things; it's always such a reflection upon a young man's bringing up to do so, and, in your case, certainly very unjust to your uncle and me; for both by precept and example, you know you were trained so differently."

"Forgive me for wounding you, Aunt Alice," now offered the young man, with some show of contrition. "Of course, to be the credit that I ought to your and Uncle George's good training, I should be a paragon of all the virtues; I know that. But it's clear that I'm not, and I'm afraid it's not 'in the nature of the baste,' Auntie; though I suppose I'm not much worse than the average young man, and not better perhaps, either," he admitted. "Anyhow, I don't set myself up for a saint. But to return to our subject; my sentiment for Alice isn't to be mentioned in the same breath with any former fancy. I'm unquestionably in love *now*, and I realize that it's the first time, too. I *want* the dear young creature, Auntie; and you know when Gerald Harding *wants* a thing, he *wants* it."

"Yes, Gerald, I know; although it's hardly necessary to remind your foster-mother of that fact." This with quite unflattering frankness, though not unkindly, while his aunt smiled a knowing smile. "I'm not at all surprised that you should *want* the girl, either," she added; "but Alice is as you say, young, and I'm thinking, might it not be wiser for you to look for someone nearer your own age?"

"Well, that's surely a good one on you, Aunt Alice,"—her nephew, now, in turn, laughed quite heartily for a moment—"seeing that she's a whole lot nearer to my age than you are to Uncle George's. A *lapsus lingua* that, surely; you didn't wait to think three times before you spoke, as you always advised *my* doing; that's very evident. But, all jokes aside, if she and I married and lived *half* as happily together as you and he have done, there'd be no kick a-comin' from dis yer chile; you can safely bet your bottom dollar on that. Alice is my ideal, exactly; first, as to looks. Now an artist,—as you can readily understand,—could never be happy with a scarecrow or a dowdy seated opposite him at table all his life, so I should never think of marrying any but a pretty girl. Alice is more than pretty, she's *beautiful*; with that ethereal beauty"—"comes from the beautiful soul within, Gerald," interrupted his Aunt—"so rarely met with, which makes her a continual feast to the eye; hence, she will always be pleasing to me, you see."

"Yes, I see," responded his listener, laconically, with a significant nod.

"Then, having been brought up at home almost entirely and alone, her innocence is so delightfully refreshing as to be charming. Excuse *me*, please," he went on, "from marrying one of your up-to-date, enlightened, know-it-all young misses, who could give their mothers—yes, and their grandmothers even—pointers and rules for guidance upon delicate matters that they should know nothing whatever about, without so much as a blush or the blink of an eye. I shall be quite capable, I guess, of teaching *my* wife all that it's *necessary* for her to know along those lines; more than that she's better ignorant of. Then another thing; her disposition's *perfect, absolutely*; so sweet, unselfish and forgiving; and whoever she marries, she'll no doubt have enough exercise for those good qualities to prevent their becoming atrophied. She's accomplished, too," he went on to enumerate, "and has a fortune. Not that I'd marry for money, you understand; I don't have to. I can put my hand on a pretty penny of my own,—or will be able to in a few years more," he qualified—"and *could* have done so long before this, if that pesky old Grandad of mine hadn't been so ridiculous!"

"Gerald, why *will* you speak with such disrespect of your Grand-father!" burst out Mrs. Nichols, indignantly. "I *hoped* I had you broken of that reprehensible habit."

"Well it *was* a pesky thing for the darned old duffer to do, Auntie," persisted the man, angrily.

"O, my boy, you seem *incorrigible!*" The woman's deep drawn sigh of disappointment was indicative of recognized failure. "We must surely have spoiled you."

"No you didn't, Auntie; but what's the sense of keeping a fellow's money from him 'till he's got one foot in the grave-r, and the other all butte-r, as your drawling Methodists say. Let him have it while he's young, and can enjoy it."

"*You* won't be an old man, by any means, when you come into your own, Gerald," spoke up his aunt, with asperity; "and had it been yours to control younger, it might very easily have been a minus quantity with you by this time; you wouldn't have set the fashion in Prodigal Sons, you know, by *any* means. Your Grand-father was exceedingly wise, I think."

"Well, Auntie, we've never happened to hold the same opinions on that subject," rejoined the other, with really rude uppishness, "and it's hardly likely that we ever will; so we'd better agree, perhaps, to disagree, and not discuss it further. I'd much prefer talking about the girl, anyway; far pleasanter theme. As you see," he went on, determinedly, "she possesses every qualification to make me *supremely* happy, which felicity you'd hardly begrudge me, I think."

"It would certainly *seem* as though she did, Gerald," returned the aunt, with an amused smile, ignoring her nephew's rather sarcastic closing remark. "But what about *her* 'felicity'? I haven't heard so much as a syllable on *that* score, yet."

"Why, there's no question but what a wife could be happy enough with *me*, Aunt Alice," returned the man, with an elevation of brow betokening great surprise at the preposterous question. "I'm not bad looking, have some brains—I flatter myself—and a little talent, am becoming famous, can provide her a fine establishment, and, as husbands go, have no doubt I shall prove rather a decent sort of fellow. That is," he continued, "if I can have the one I love. Of course, if I made a marriage *de convenance*, or with one of those flippy, flappy, flighty French girls, who hover about a fellow's studio like harpies, for whom I didn't care a sou-markee, and whom I knew was only marrying me as a means to an end—for you must know, Auntie, that the creed of the average *Parisienne* is not that marriage, in itself, is pleasure, but merely the semi-respectable path to it—why there might be some room for doubt upon the subject. But not if it's Alice, Auntie; not if it's Alice; I should be devotion itself to *her*, for I *love* her; *madly; passionately; wildly*; and of *course* I'd make her life happy. So promise me that you'll bring her over next year and let me have my innings before she makes her bow to Society," he finished. "You ought to be willing to give your pet nephew *that* much of a handicap, surely."

Now the conversation with her loved nephew had been a very great disappointment to Mrs. Nichols, for it had clearly shown all those adverse traits of character which she had hoped, nay almost believed, over-

come, to be still present; even dominant and virulent. The knowledge saddened her; and taking his face between her hands as he ceased speaking, she studied it intently for a moment; then said with deep feeling, "Oh, my boy! you are *so like your father!* and he was a——very handsome man, Gerald," she finished, lightly, with a forced, yes, a sad smile, and as though in pity; checking the reproach which had hurried itself to her lips; for, no, she could not bring herself to taunt the irresponsible offspring with the shortcomings of its sire.

"And you'll bring her over, Auntie?" urged Gerald, coaxingly.

"Perhaps," was the evasive reply.

"O, don't be so beastly indefinite!" exclaimed the other, impatiently; with almost an exhibition of his old-time, childish petulance. "Promise, and cheer a fellow with the glad anticipation."

But Mrs. Nichols shook her head. "I'll *think* about it, Gerald," she at length vouchsafed. And this promise the woman faithfully kept; indeed, had his foster-mother been inclined to dismiss the project from her mind, the many importunate reminders in the now frequenter letters would have prevented.

But the more the subject was dwelt upon by her, each weighing and measuring of the man, but forced her the more irrevocably to the sorry conclusion—for Gerald was still dear to his Aunt Alice—that he was neither a worthy or safe person to be trusted with the

future of her innocent young charge; that it must be her unpleasant duty, not only to keep them apart, but even to dissuade the girl against the favoring of his suit, should she, perchance, at any time show a disposition to do the reverse, when he himself should make opportunity to press it,—as she well knew the determined man would do.

“Cruel, heartless, irreverent, ungrateful, disrespectful, selfish, probably loose,” mused the aunt, dejectedly, when reviewing her nephew’s dominant traits, revealed so glaringly in this interview regarding his love affairs. ‘Like father like son,’ she moralized. Then murmured sorrowfully, “O, my poor, deluded sister! To think that it should have been your unhappy fate to be instrumental in perpetuating such pernicious qualities; *Heaven pity* the girl who becomes his wife! Not for lack of vigilant and loving oversight upon *my* part, shall *my* dear motherless one ever come under the spell of his baleful influence.”

And yet, while registering with herself this worthy vow, a beautiful sense of loyalty kept Mrs. Nichols’ lips sealed as to this unflattering opinion of Gerald; not even to her husband, who like herself had dwelt upon the young man’s seeming improvement with much gratification, would she speak of the bitter disappointment which she had experienced in him at the very last.

CHAPTER V.

A CRUEL PLOT—RELUCTANT GOODBYES.

“‘Well, all I can do is to hope for the best; Georgie’s good name must be preserved at **any** cost, if possible.’”

“‘And you won’t forget **me**, dearest?’”

Now Gerald Harding’s glowing tribute to the enviable felicity of Mr. and Mrs. Nichols,—which the reader has in mind from the foregoing conversation—was but an echo of the same, oft-repeated sentiment of their many friends; for in the exclusive social set in which they moved, the couple were regarded as a synonym for the most perfect conjugal affection. *Love*—not the diluted, expansive variety, but the pure, concentrated essence—had been the sole excuse—reason, rather—for their marriage; and their pathway through life had been made almost dazzlingly bright by the unflickering steadiness of its holy flame. Despite the croakings of the envious,—who had prophesied for them but a short and unsatisfactory married life,—not even the divorce-laden atmosphere of their home city had been able to inject into their Eden, dissatisfaction and discontent; the deadly germs of its infection.

With kind, indulgent eyes, life had looked upon them out of a uniformly smiling face. One boon alone had it denied them: pledges of their love. But far

from proving a bone of contention between the two,—as is sometimes the case,—the disappointment had but served to deepen the affection of each for the other. Health and prosperity had been their blessed portion, and the pride of the husband in the grace, dignity and *eclat* with which the wife had presided over the costly home his ability and industry had provided, was not less than hers, in the honorable position to which *he* had attained among his fellows. True, the wife, during all their more than twenty years of partnership, had quite lived up to her reputed extravagant tastes; but the husband's happiness in catering to her expensive whims and wishes had been boundless. Money had been plentiful always, and certainly she had used it without stint. How or where it came from had given her no thought or concern, and not unnaturally; for Mr. Nichols had been a man of means before taking unto himself a wife, as well as established in a profitable business; beside which, her confidence in 'Georgie's' ability to move mountains in this as in any other matter, was absolute; while he, had troubles come, would fain have borne them to the breaking point, alone, before that any anxious thought or care should have been laid upon the light and joyous heart of his much loved wife.

George Nichols, however, had always been a speculator, and with the Bears. So long as he felt himself to be a comparatively little ship, he had been content to keep reasonably close to shore; but as the years

went by, and the fickle goddess, Fortune, steadily smiling upon him, *more and more* crowned both his legitimate endeavors and speculative ventures with success, the one-time cautious gambler became gradually emboldened to a deeper and deeper dabbling in the fascinating, risky business, until, in the Spring of '98, standing in with the powers that were, and governed by an unshakable belief in their ability to bring about a fierce, speedy and permanent slump from the abnormally and unwarranted high price of wheat, he had at last plunged recklessly in; only to go down—after a few days of alternate bounding hope and racking fear—to practically financial ruin, as the result of an attempted disastrous *corner* of that year. With blindest confidence the man had sold *short* to such an incredible degree, that in order to maintain his business standing and credit by *covering* at once, he had been obliged to sacrifice his entire personal holdings, valuable properties and stocks and bonds. So that, when debts had been paid and his affairs once more adjusted, the salvage from the wreck of a large fortune of a few weeks earlier consisted of a bank account, adequate for little if any more than a year's living, and their town and country homes; both of which had been given to the wife outright at time of building, long years before.

Mr. Nichols was already several years beyond the three-score-and-ten mark, at this time, and could therefore no longer be classed as a *young* man, although up to this period in life he had been considered as excep-

tionally level-headed by his *confreres*; yet by no possible stretch of the imagination could this last hazardous putting of all his eggs into one basket have been termed a wise proceeding. However, had there been individual loss only to worry over, the man would no doubt have quickly rallied from the shock to pride and purse, and, undaunted, have taken up the task of rehabilitating his shattered fortunes; for while no longer young, he was sound of limb and stout of heart, blessed also with a wife, who, when the unwelcome news could no longer be concealed from her, in view of her husband's past achievements, had risen grandly to the situation, with such an uplifting sympathy and sublime faith in his undoubted ability to *recoup*, as to be both comforting and strengthening in the extreme.

Influenced, however, by a commendable zeal—which had unfortunately outrun his judgment at this time—for the increasing of his nephew's fortune also, he had plunged for *him*, as well,—into what he believed to be a *phenomenal* opportunity for them both,—with the result that seventy-five thousand dollars—three-fourths of the remaining inheritance which must be turned over to the young man scarcely two years later—had been swept away.

Brooding over this latter loss and the discouraging outlook for escape from the embarrassing predicament in which it placed him, soon brought the unhappy man to a bed of sickness; and not even the long period of convalescence at their mountain home had been able

to bring back the color to his cheek, the brightness to his eye, or the healthy, vigorous tone to his mind. He seemed all at once to have become an *old* man.

This disaster had occurred during the Spring preceding Gerald's unexpected visit home; and explains why his presence seemed to make 'poor Uncle George.'—as Alice had confided to Robert Manning,—'nervous and irritable; altogether unlike himself, you know.'

Ignorant of the cause,—for he had not yet found heart to tell his wife the full extent of his losses,—Mrs. Nichols was of course much puzzled by her husband's changed and peculiar attitude towards their foster-child. Setting it down, however, as the temporary vagary of an invalid, without comment she had inconspicuously made a point of keeping the two as much as possible apart. But after Gerald's departure the whole truth had come out.

It was a disagreeable revelation, indeed, to the woman. Their own losses had troubled her but little; Gerald's, though, was quite another matter, and, as she was not slow to realize, a serious one at her husband's time of life. As the weeks, aye, *months*, dragged by, and he appeared unable to rid himself of the burden of depression and despondency which had settled down upon him, unfitting him for the same former successful handling of his business, the one-time confident wife became the prey of very disquieting conjectures. What if the required amount should *not* be forthcoming at the stipulated date? was the distracting ques-

tion she now often asked herself, and ever with increased anxiety. Gerald, ungrateful and wholly wrapped up in self, as he was, would show no disposition to leniency, she well knew, but with Shylockian rapacity would exact the pound of flesh, and the hitherto unsullied name of her husband would then be covered with infamy, even though his intentions had been of the purest.

Ever as she dwelt upon the possibility of such a sad and crushing climax to the blameless life of the noble man, the heart of the fond, proud wife was filled with dread alarm; while at the same time she chafed with intense regret at her seeming inability to help in any way. 'To be sure, there are *my* properties,' she would tell herself, 'but even these would not be enough, and at Georgie's age and impaired state of health, he is apt to be laid aside from the activities of business life at any time, and then I would need them to sell to take care of him; so of course we couldn't give *them* to Gerald, even if he would be satisfied with now mortgaged real estate.'

For *many, many* months was the distressed woman haunted by the spectre of such tormenting fears, unrelieved by any cheering thought or ray of hope; but upon one especially depressing day, some good—or evil—genius, had suddenly opened the eyes of her mind to a way out of the difficulty. A way so simple, seemingly, and promising, as to fill her with wonderment that the expedient had not long before been thought of

by her. Gerald was in love with Alice; wished to marry her; had begged for and was counting upon *her* good offices to that end; the girl had *money*; if, then, she should bring about the consummation of his wishes, his fondly cherished hopes,—and why not? she had helped make matches before,—the fortune thus brought would compensate for the loss of his own, and gratitude to her for securing for him the much coveted prize, would certainly keep the boy from harboring harsh and vindictive feelings against his uncle.

Thus, speciously did she reason to herself regarding this encouraging new idea, which, to her troubled mind, seemed freighted with the only feasible solution of the perplexities attending the harassing situation. Yet not at once, nor even without many misgivings at the last, could the love which was impelling this loyal little wife to the shouldering of so grave and far-reaching a responsibility, bring her to commit herself to an acceptance of the tempting proposition; so deep-seated was her distrust of her nephew, so great her love for the girl. But as she waited and waited, and watched in vain for signs of improvement in her dearly loved husband, *his* well-being became paramount to all other considerations; at length converting her to the belief that the end would justify the means. ‘As for Robert,’ she would argue to herself, in defence of the meditated treachery, ‘why he’s young, and will get over the disappointment in time; scarcely anybody marries their

first love, anyway, and later in life are mostly glad of it; tastes change so with years. And as for Alice, why, marriage is but a lottery after all; and Gerald may prove as good a risk as Rob, or any other man. He certainly *seems* very deeply in love with her. Well, all I can do is to *hope* for the best; Georgie's good name must be preserved at *any* cost, if possible.'

Now, 'in a multitude of counsellors there is safety'; and notwithstanding her well known passion for *managing* things, in this emergency Mrs. Nichols would gladly have sought advice and taken counsel of some more experienced, possible wiser head, as to the better course to pursue. But the very damaging nature of the facts in the case seemed to make it altogether obligatory that she keep silence, and be guided but by the dictates of her own loving and distracted heart.

Once conclusions had been reached, however, and plans formulated, with characteristic directness and singleness of purpose, the woman began injecting into her correspondence with her nephew a noticeably more encouraging tone, while letters to her niece, thenceforth bristled with alluring references to the trip before them for the following Summer, and glowing pictures of the delights in store.

Excepting for Mr. and Mrs. Nichols, this year had been a pleasant one for all our waiting friends. To the happy—even though separated—young lovers, immersed in study as both were, and with the weeks enlivened by a correspondence bright and breezy, while

yet softly breathing of their sweet, young love, time had flown by as on gold-tipped, sparkling wings. The festive Christmas-tide, which Alice had gone West to spend, although but a brief one, had been a supremely happy holiday for them all; for Margaret Manning's pride and pleasure in her manly son, were scarcely greater than those felt in the winsome girl in whose affections she had long occupied the place of mother. Yes, those were in truth happy days for our old-time friend, in spite of her more humble home and modest manner of life; and, oh, how many there were to envy her the devoted, dutiful son, and the prospective daughter.

"After this year, I shall spend half of my time with you, Mamma," Alice had declared to her mother upon that visit; "and only that I know it would disappoint Aunt Alice so, I wouldn't go to Paris next Summer at all. You know I'd much rather be at the Lake with you and Bob, don't you?"

"I like to believe that you would, dearie," replied the elder, with an affectionate kiss; "and you know how dreadfully we shall miss our little girl. But we must not be selfish. Some day you'll be with us always, and when the time comes, it will be a day of the deepest satisfaction and contentment for us all, I am sure, sweet one."

"And you won't forget *me*, Dearie?" implored Robert, as he bade his adored one a most doleful good-bye at the conclusion of her short visit. "You can't

imagine what a gloomy prospect it is for me to think of not seeing you again for nearly a year, Alice. Why that's much the longest time we've ever been separated, in all our lives! and it will be an *Eternity* to me; especially the time you're with Gerald. "O, sweetheart; I do *so* wish you weren't going!" he finished, dejectedly.

"So do I, Rob;" answered the girl promptly, and there was no doubting the sincerity of her declaration. "But you know I simply can't get out of it. Don't worry about Gerald though, Rob, *please* don't; for you know it's not to see *him* that I'm going. Can't you trust me, dear?" she asked, a bit reproachfully; "you *know* that I don't care for Gerald; that I shall *never* love any one but *you*; *don't* make me unhappy by doubting me."

"Forgive me, Alice," returned the troubled youth. "I know it's both unjust and ungenerous to show a seeming lack of confidence, and after all, it's more fears than doubts that disturb me; for Gerald's such a handsome, fascinating fellow, that I can't help feeling him to be a dangerous rival."

"And he's wonderfully interesting and entertaining as well, Rob"; added the girl, frankly. "Auntie says he'll be sure to make our visit a *very* delightful one, and in a way, I expect to enjoy it. But he isn't a *rival*, at all," Alice corrected, emphatically; "he doesn't *want* to be; of that I'm *positive*; but if he did, I wouldn't let him, as I've told you many times already. So now *do*

let that assurance drive all those unworthy doubts away. I shall really begin to think you don't love me if you keep them any longer, Rob," admonished the girl. Then, "Right after we get back, very early in the Fall, Auntie's going to give me a swell 'coming out'; and after that I shall soon come back home. By Thanksgiving at the very latest, I shall be with you again, and such a *lot* of the time afterwards; and O how *proud* you'll be, Rob, of a girl decked out as fine as *I* shall be"; she concluded, almost vainly. For hers was a truly feminine young heart, which *adored* pretty things.

"O, shoot the clothes, Alice!" exclaimed Robert, with loving impatience. "It's *you* I'll want to see, and of course I'll be proud of you. Besides, all the ostrich and marabout tips—that's what you call 'em, isn't it?—and Bird of Paradise plumage in the *world*, couldn't make *you* look *one bit lovelier* than you really *are*."

Thus, reluctantly, they parted, that bright, mid-Winter day, these our dear young friends in whom interest now so deeply centers. Thus were their last goodbyes said; the youth, uncomfortably oppressed by anxious fears, although unconscious of the cruel plot that had been hatched against them, and notwithstanding the oft-repeated and confident assurances of the girl; through all of whose future correspondence upon the subject also, ran ever the same, glad, cheering note.

CHAPTER VI.

A TRIP ABROAD—LOVE *versus* DUTY.

" 'Then I **can't** do it, Auntie!' exclaimed the tortured girl, bursting into tears. 'For just the mere **thought** of Rob's loving any one else makes me turn O, so **sick** and **faint**!'"

Stern Winter's reign was ended. Snow and sleet and icy mask had long since vanished before the conquering, onward march of gentle Spring, and early Summer's cloudless skies, invigorating sunshine and genial breezes, were brooding and dancing over land and sea.

Had the eye of the reader been scanning the passenger list of a certain ocean greyhound steaming out of New York harbor, for Plymouth, England, one late June day of that year, it would have fallen upon these two familiar names:

'Mrs. George Benedict Nichols.'

'Alice Gertrude Nichols.'

and maid.

'Chicago, Ill.'

And great and pardonable would have been the pride felt, in claiming old acquaintance with a singularly sweet, aristocratic looking young girl, and an alert, stylish matron—of that age when woman is said to be at her best, the early forties—who hurried from a

rapidly driven cab the instant it had stopped, hastened down the deserted gang-plank—which had already awaited their arrival some beyond the appointed hour for sailing—and at once made their way to the attractive suite, amid-ships, reserved for the owners of the aforesaid names.

As the residue of our story in no wise hinges upon the incidents of this voyage, we pass them over in silence, although much might have developed from them; for the beautiful young bud of our acquaintance speedily became the cynosure of all eyes; the target for admiring glances from the men, and of envy or conjecture from many of the women aboard. But the unusually watchful and attentive chaperonage of her aunt, afforded little opportunity for either expressions of admiration or the gratification of curiosity. For Mrs. Nichols was not upon pleasure bent, at this time, it must be understood. She was now a woman with a mission; seriously set upon the accomplishment of her purpose, and withal, deeply conscious of the many charms of her attractive young niece.

‘Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty’; and it was no part of her carefully arranged programme to invite disaster at this point, by allowing opportunities for any possible ship-board flirtations or incipient attachments, which might still further complicate matters and prove but additional obstacles for her to overcome, later. There was therefore but little mingling with their fellow passengers, and that little even, unsatisfactory; for

a natural shyness and reserve of manner with strangers, upon the part of the girl, and one assumed for the occasion by the older woman, soon won for the pair a reputation for ultra-exclusiveness, and they had been left to the enjoyment of a seclusion, welcome indeed. At least, welcome to the preoccupied mind and overburdened heart of the lady. Fortunately somewhat brightened for her fair charge, however, by a big, unexpected batch of steamer letters, and a 'goodbye, and don't forget Rob,' upon a Western Union blank; all of which awaited the surprised and popular girl.

Important, even necessary as she now felt her errand abroad to be, it had nevertheless not been without reluctance that Mrs. Nichols had torn herself from home and husband for a time, for mentally, Mr. Nichols had but gone from bad to worse; while physically, his condition was also much less promising. Yet these very facts had combined to freight the worried woman's mind with an unfaltering conviction as to the imperative need for action upon her part, and a feeling of impatient haste to make good, as well. Loath as she had been to leave him however, her husband's almost pathetic doggedness of determination to remain at the post of duty at this time, even though really little able for the pursuit of business, had truly been a relief to the plotting wife, since his presence would undoubtedly have made the carrying out of her undivulged scheme extremely difficult, if not impossible. She had therefore made no effort to persuade him to

accompany her, and thus it happened that she and Alice had set out alone, on this momentous journey.

With malice aforethought, during the exclusive and intimate association of the trip across, the story of the exceptional love and care bestowed upon her adored father when a helpless child, by his devoted elder brother, had more than once been most graphically recounted to the niece; that thereby her tender young heart might be filled with a lively sense of obligation and gratitude to the absent uncle. A proceeding laudable enough, perhaps, in itself, and crowned with the desired success; but surely a most extraordinary manner in which to while away the first leisure of a young graduate, just in the heyday of delight at her emancipation.

But Mrs. Nichols was no longer her former jolly self; due solely—so thought her sympathetic companion—to anxiety over the ill-health of her husband; and only once upon the journey did the old-time vim and spirit flash forth, and that when administering a rebuke. Their uneventful voyage had been quickly made, and speeding on towards London with the minimum of delay, they had reached the great metropolis on the 'glorious Fourth.' Their greeting with a 'Hip! Hurrah!' by a group of staunch Americans, as their nationality was recognized by the tiny, silken flags, loyally displayed upon the lapels of their traveling coats, had seemed to irritate a fellow traveler—a gruff son of Albion—who immediately took occasion to give vent to a boastful 'Brittania rules the waves.'

'Perhaps,' instantly retorted the zealous little patriot—whose ire was at once aroused by the uncalled-for fling—"but never the hearts of Columbia's sons and daughters, and *especially* upon this proud day." Accompanying her patriotic and silencing words with a most provoking shrug, and tone of implied uncertainty even, upon the subject of his boast.

They had made no stay in London, for even to the girl the attractions of the wonderful city were not unknown; but had gone hastening on to their Mecca, which Alice was approaching with all the excited joyousness and impatience of anticipation of a young girl, about to pay her initial visit to the Old World's fairy-land, and even more than usually eager to arrive, perhaps, because of their particularly quiet, sober voyage. But at Calais a delightful surprise awaited; for Gerald had run up to meet them, and her advent into the gay city was therefore made under the extravagantly attentive escort of a would-be suitor.

"Bless your sweet life, Auntie!" was the young man's first and grateful exclamation, while giving to Mrs. Nichols a most affectionate welcome. "I can't begin to tell you how over-joyed I am to see you and my charming Cousin once more"; and in his eager, admiring glances as he greeted the girl, their Aunt had been rejoiced to read the hoped for tale of a restrained, but undiminished ardor, an impatient love and longing.

That the man was indeed proud to act as escort to

so noticeable a girl as Alice, could not be questioned; and his devoted, almost worshipful attentions, seemed to evidence a great and wondrous happiness with which her presence filled his heart. Nor was the girl ignorant of a pleasurable thrill at their unexpected meeting; for Gerald, as we know, had proven a very agreeable and interesting companion during their previous association, and ignorant of his intentions, her greeting contained an unaffected—we might say, unconscious—warmth; which to the hopeful and conceited lover's fancy, evinced a gratifying modicum of encouragement.

"Alice knows nothing as yet, Gerald"; explained Mrs. Nichols to her nephew as they two canvassed the situation on the evening of her arrival, after that the girl, at her suggestion, had retired; "so don't be too brash at first; go a bit slow for a little, for I know that she will have to be won gradually. At the same time," she hinted broadly, "I would also give you this pointer; if you *really want* her, you must never let her go back to Rob. That she *loves* him is undoubtedly true, for coming over, she was scarce never without one of his letters, his photo, or his parting telegram in her hands; and I don't know *how* many replies she posted when we landed, besides cabling him. Still," she went on, encouragingly, "out of sight is very often out of mind, we know, especially with a young person in a gay whirl; so make things *hum*, Gerald, for in the terse, expressive language of our future classics, it's 'the

Johnny on the spot' who usually wins out in such cases, you know." Continuing, in a very impressive manner, "There's nobody living but you for whom I'd consent to interfere in a love affair, my dear boy, but 'blood's thicker than water,' and you've always been very dear to me, Gerald. Now that I've delivered the goods, however, I wipe my hands of the whole matter; don't expect any further help from *me*; henceforth your fate is in your own hands, and if you fail to win so tempting a prize as Alice, why it will certainly not be through any remissness of *mine*. It's hardly necessary for me to tell *you* I think"—she smiled knowingly, as she spoke—"that it's always the part of wisdom in such cases to 'make hay while the sun shines,' or that 'opportunities, like eggs, should be hatched while fresh.' This is *your* day of opportunity, Gerald, and it will of necessity be brief, for my stay will be limited in consequence of your uncle's ill-health"; the bright, earnest face, here instantly clouding at the recollection. "I really ought not to have left him at all." A sigh of regret filled an instant's pause ere his aunt continued, "When I return, of course, Alice goes with me. Unless—"

"Unless what?" interjected her attentive listener quickly, as the woman hesitated.

"Why, unless she should have been persuaded in the meantime to change her name. *Verbum sat sapienti*, Gerald"; she finished, after much, *much* more conversation in the same strain; "you haven't altogether forgotten your Latin, I trust."

"No, not altogether, Auntie," Her nephew laughed. "At least, I can still manage as dead easy a translation as that, and I flatter myself that I'm wise enough to not need more than one word upon the subject, beside. Trust *me* to not let such a tempting prize slip through my fingers; and the happy day can't come a bit too soon to please me, either. The hard part will be to go slow, at all; for the little charmer's surely got my tender heart thoroughly in tow. But how long shall you be here, Auntie, anyway? How many days, weeks or months am I to have, in which to get in my deadly work?" he inquired, jokingly.

"Two months, perhaps, Gerald; three at the very most"; was the other's exceedingly business-like reply.

Thus coached and advised, the young man's plans were of course both wisely laid and warily carried out. A constant round of the very sight-seeing and merry-making best calculated to captivate the heart of a fresh, inexperienced girl, was now begun, and for three delightful weeks, Alice Nichols lived as though in an enchanting dream. Gerald was taking a long arranged for vacation and his time was therefore all at the disposal of his more than welcome guests. His constant attendance and gallant devotion to their entertainment, no less than his unmistakable enjoyment of their visit, were extremely flattering and equally charming to the unsuspecting girl, for in all their intercourse, there was not the least approach to love-making. And not unmindful of Robert's expressed fears upon this point,

in all her letters to the youth,—which were both regular and frequent—accounts of the good times she was having were thoughtfully interlarded with this comforting assurance.

"I know you'll be relieved, Rob," she wrote in one, "to know that you were mistaken as to Gerald's being in love with me, and sorry that you doubted his sincerity last Summer. I know you'll never do him such an injustice again, but instead, feel very kindly towards him because of the good time he's giving us. His grateful and affectionate devotion to Auntie is *perfectly lovely*, and you couldn't help admiring him for it, just as *I* do. I want that you and he should be friends, always, dearest, for I shall feel under great obligations to him from now on."

But this inspiring message—the last upon the subject—had barely reached its destination, when an appalling change came over the spirit of the faithful girl's dreams; for Gerald, now too deeply infatuated for longer silence, suddenly assumed the role of lover so impatiently delayed, and laid violent siege to her heart; taking advantage of his first favoring opportunity alone with the girl, to tell her of his love and press his suit.

It was an *entrancing* Summer evening; and after a late dinner at one of the brilliant cafes of the Palais Royal, which had closed a day of strenuous tripping about, the happy trio had returned to the apartment occupied by the visitors in the fashionable Rue de

Blanc, and settled down in its pretty parlour for a quiet evening at home. Gerald, lolling in indolent ease at one end of a luxurious divan, from out the airy clouds of smoke wreathing upwards from the fragrant Havana at which he lazily puffed, with long-ing heart, once more feverishly drank in the flower-like grace and beauty of the lovely girl in white, carelessly reclining at its other end, well nigh lost to view amid the array of rich, delicate cushions surrounding her; while with her animated young face aglow with pleasure and enthusiasm, she entertained and amused her auditors with an extravagant, girlish rhapsody, about *dear, delightful Paris*.

As she finished, her ever present chaperon, reading unerringly the impetuous mood of her nephew, and feeling the time to be both ripe and most auspicious for a climax, excused herself for awhile with the plea of 'a letter to your Uncle George that I wish Gerald to post when he goes out'; and retired to her own room, which adjoined.

The door had not more than closed upon her, than the young man, brisk as a flea, had straightened up, dropped his unfinished cigar upon the Sevres receiver conveniently placed upon an inlaid tabouret close by, and drawing very near to Alice, asked—with a most insinuating sweetness of tone and look—"How would you like to live in Paris always, Cousin mine?" adding quickly, "with *me*, I mean." And before the girl had recovered from her astonishment enough to answer,

he had slipped an arm lovingly about her, taken her hand in his disengaged one, and with *most fervid* utterance, was pouring into her unwilling ear, the same sweet story, the same entrancing fairy tale which, from the days of Adam on, men have been seductively whispering into the expectant and unexpectant ears of countless Eves, in every clime and lingo.

"O, *please* stop, Gerald!" entreated the blushing girl, endeavoring to free herself. "I can't listen to such things from you; really I can't!"

"Why not, sweetheart?" queried the lover; in a surprised and much disappointed tone, though without releasing her.

"Because—because—why—I'm engaged already, Gerald"; she stammered, confusedly.

"Engaged already?" repeated the man in dismay. "O don't ask me to believe anything so cruelly disappointing as *that*, dearest!"

"I'm very sorry if it's a disappointment to you, Gerald, but it's a fact, nevertheless; so *please* let me go."

"Who to, Alice, and since when?" asked the lover, with great importunity; though still making no move to comply with the twice repeated request of the girl to be released.

"Why to Rob Manning; and since—*always!*" was the frank, though bashful reply, "and I supposed you knew, Gerald."

"Knew! Why I never had the faintest suspicion

even of such a thing, sweetheart!" returned the man with a well feigned show of surprise at the information." But that's only a make-believe engagement anyway; a sort of playing at love"; he continued lightly; as though the thought were a relief.

"No it isn't, Gerald; it's *really* and *truly*; honest it is"; persisted the girl, in answer to his doubting look. "Of course, it hasn't been announced yet, and I'm not wearing a ring; but Rob and I are pledged to each other, just the same."

"Such pledges as that aren't binding though, Alice, and I'd be very sorry to see you make a marriage of that sort!" Continuing, with an almost fatherly tenderness and concern, "for your happiness is too dear to me, little one. I've known so many of these baby love unions," he went on, "and they're always failures; you'd be sure to be unhappy, Alice."

"O, no we wouldn't, Gerald"; contradicted the girl sweetly, though with unquestionable certainty; "for we—er—*love* each other!" she blurted out; while an embarrassed blush at once suffused her cheek at this delicate confession.

"But that's not the safe kind of love to marry for, Alice"; then argued the wily lover, earnestly. "Marriage is a very serious matter, you must know, and needs a mature, deep love to carry one through its trials and perplexities. Now Rob's only a boy, and can't *possibly* feel for you such a love as mine."

"And I'm only a girl, Gerald; but I know that Rob's

love is mature enough, and deep enough to carry me through *anything*"; returned the loyal girl, with proudest confidence in her tones.

"Well, I'm not going to let him have you, Alice, anyway!" the persistent lover now boldly proclaimed. "Not after I've waited for you for *years*!"

"Rob has too, Gerald."

"Why I've loved you ever since you were in pinafores, Alice"; her companion went on; with much of elasticity in the statement, as we know.

"So has Rob"; responded the girl, softly.

"But, sweetheart, I *can't* give you up!"—this despairingly, and with every evidence of the deepest feeling. "Ever since those *supremely* happy weeks which we spent together last year, my thoughts of you have been my *life*! sleeping or waking, you have *never* been absent from them, for my day-dreams have been castles *for* you, my night-dreams visions *of* you; and I have felt so hopeful, even *sure* of winning you. I *want* you so; I *need* you so; so much more than Rob does, for he has his mother, while I, like yourself, have *no* one!" he breathed, pathetically. "Oh, can't you feel for my *loneliness*, darling? Be mine, Alice!" the man pleaded. "Come to me! give me your heart; your love; your life; and take in return a heart which *never* has nor *ever* will beat for any but you; a love, deathless, a life, laid at your feet, to worship you, to serve you! O, say that you are mine, sweetheart," he implored, "and I am yours to command, *now* and *forever*!"

With a well developed sense of the proprieties, the young girl had made repeated attempts—though ineffectual—to check the man's rapid flow of loving words, and free herself from his detaining embrace and as his hold upon her was now unconsciously relaxed a little while he half paused for breath, she quickly drew from out his encircling arm, and broke in sweetly with, "I *can't* do as you ask, Gerald, for my heart and love have both been given to another, and my life pledged to him. I *couldn't* go back on my promise; why it would *kill* Rob if I did, and I don't want to, either; for I've dearly loved him *always*; indeed, I can't remember the time when I—"

"But you'd learn to love me just as deeply, Alice" interrupted the wooer, passionately; "and I'd make your life so happy that you'd forget all about him in a little while."

"No, Gerald," instantly returned the girl"; I could never forget, or learn to love anyone else, so long as there's *Rob*. And I am so sorry that this has happened for it really makes me very unhappy to say no to *you*, you've been so kind, and I like and admire you so very much. O, *how* I wish I hadn't come over! then all this could have been avoided!" she finished, tremulously.

"No it wouldn't, Darling," put in the other, still as lover-like; for I should have come to you. And I won't give you up, either!" he declared, with flattering determination." I shall make you take advantage

of your woman's privilege and change your mind, yet. I shall continue to live upon that hope, Alice, anyway."

"Please don't do that, Gerald"; urged the girl; adding firmly though sweetly, "for it would mean but another disappointment for you. Besides, I shall not stay here any longer now; I shall speak to Auntie the first thing in the morning about going home."

"And spoil *her* visit, *Alice*?" asked the artful man, reproachfully. "Why I wouldn't have believed that *you* could have been that selfish."

"Auntie needn't go, Gerald; I can travel alone. But I'm sure it wouldn't be right for me to continue your guest after this"; declared the conscientious girl. Then suddenly rising and bidding him a most unexpected and hasty good-night, Alice slipped quickly from the room.

Now there are probably as many and diverse types of love—so called—as there are hearts to feel it, or motives to inspire it; and according to *his* type, Gerald Harding perhaps, at this time, *did* dearly love this girl. But he even *more* dearly loved to have his own way; and disappointed at her point blank refusal, he was still further annoyed and extremely irritated by her unceremonious departure, for he had by no means finished the pressing of his suit.

"*Hell and damnation!*" he exclaimed fiercely, with an angry stamp of the foot, as the door closed behind her. And almost upon the instant, another door—

behind which was the divan upon which the two had been sitting—opened slowly, and Mrs. Nichols re-entered the room, bringing with her the pretext letter.

“Why what has happened, Gerald?” she asked, anxiously; catching the man’s last lurid word and noting the absence of her niece.

“Nothing, only that I’ve been most beautifully turned down!” growled her nephew, with vexation and disgust.

“Why, Gerald?” came the eager question, as the woman seated herself beside him.

“Says she’s engaged already.”

“To—”

“Yes, to that blamed kid; the devil take him!” interrupted her companion hotly. “I wish he was in purgatory right now!”

“But you *surely* aren’t going to be discouraged and give up at first refusal, my dear boy!” burst out his aunt—at once alarmed for the success of her important project. “I never would have imagined *you* so faint-hearted as that. Besides, to say *no* and mean *yes* comes natural to women, you know. Why I really thought you loved the girl more than that, Gerald, and had your heart more set upon winning her”; she went on; as though not only surprised, but greatly disappointed at the outcome. “Otherwise, I should not have put myself about as I have to make this most excellent opportunity for you, at such an inconvenient time.”

"My heart's just that set upon winning her, that I'm getting 'daffy;' 'dippy under the lid' about the girl;" returned the young man gloomily. "If we could keep her here, I'd have some hopes of bringing her around yet; but she won't stay; says she's going to talk to you tomorrow about going home; that it wouldn't be *right* for her to remain with me any longer now, and all that sort of infernal *tommy-rot*. It won't do the little jade any good to run away, though, *damn it!*" he went on savagely, "for I'll follow her, blest if I don't! and pester her, 'till she says yes just to get rid of me."

"That would be time and money both wasted, my dear boy"; put in the other, with most disheartening finality; "for your case is *absolutely hopeless* anywhere but *here* and *now*. Your chances would be *nil* once she's on the other side again and with *Rob*; as I told you distinctly, before."

"Then what do you let her go for"; broke in the other, pettishly. "Keep her here!"

"You talk like a child, Gerald!" exclaimed his aunt, impatiently. "I can't keep her against her will, can I?"

"No, but I'm sure you could persuade her to finish out her visit if you tried, and if you'd only intercede for me, she'd become more amenable to reason."

"Now my dear boy, *stop right there*"; commanded Mrs. Nichols; with a silencing gesture. "You know very well that I'm wholly out of the affair; I told you so when I first arrived."

"But the case is different now," argued Gerald, "and I need your help. She'll listen to you, and your opinion will have great weight with her for she's so fond of you. *Do* this much more for me, Auntie,"—coaxingly—"and you'll never regret it. You will if you don't though," he warned, "for if I can't have Alice, I'll make some disgraceful *mesalliance* or other, you may be sure of that, and you'll blame yourself as long as you live for not having saved me from it when you could."

Seeming to deliberate upon her nephew's emphatic request and threat, Mrs. Nichols delayed to answer; but after an interval, with a slowly heaved sigh as of reluctant resignation, she replied, "Well, my dear boy, I presume I shall have to humor you as of old, although my heart greatly misgives me. I'll see what I can do to keep her for you, but I don't want you to feel too sanguine of results, Gerald, for I know that I am setting myself a very difficult task. In spite of her charming amiability, Alice has a wonderfully decided *won't* of her own, in any question of supposed *right* and *wrong*."

"Whether you succeed or not, Auntie," was the man's grateful reply, "your willingness and kind attempt, will but add just that much more to my already deep sense of obligation to you."

Now, to impress her nephew with a 'deep sense of obligation,' was a highly important part of Mrs. Nichols' scheme; hence her premeditated waiting for

his appeal, before promising that assistance which she well knew would be needed; for that Alice would refuse him, was with her a moral certainty. She had played her cards well, and Gerald had 'tumbled' beautifully. Still, it was with a very heavy heart that she now left him and retired to a troubled night, in anticipation of an irksome, unhappier morrow. A self-imposed morrow, it is true; yet, although we may criticise, we may not wholly condemn. We cannot restrain a pang of pity—tinged even with admiration—for the harassed, little plotter, rent 'twixt conflicting loves and duties, and who for the sake of the stronger, was now doing wilful violence to the ingrained straight-forwardness of her nature.

Yet while not a woman to turn back once having put her hand to the plow, the heart-stirring interview with Alice on the dreaded morrow, came very near to proving a death blow to the sublime determination of this devoted wife. Long and earnestly did she labor to persuade the girl to change her mind and prolong her visit; appealing successively to a natural youthful love of enjoyment, and her characteristic unselfishness; "for of course, if you persist in going, dear, I shall go with you"; she at length told the girl; decidedly though not unkindly.

But her niece was obdurate; insisting that it could be no further enjoyment for her to remain longer, and wrong, she felt, as well; "though I should of course, be very sorry to shorten *your* visit, Auntie"; she de-

clared regretfully; "and there isn't the least need of your going, either, for I can get through all right alone."

Finding argument along these lines unavailing, Mrs. Nichols, now desperate, came out flat-footed; and with an eloquence and earnestness worthy of a greater sincerity, pleaded her nephew's cause; expatiating upon a host of good qualities of which she claimed him to be possessed, and concluding her far-fetched eulogy with, "he's so *desperately* in love with you, Alice, that I'm afraid your refusal will affect him very seriously; he seems to worship the very ground you walk on; and he's had his heart set upon winning you for *years*, it seems. He declares he will not give you up, either. And you'd be very happy with him I think, dearie"; she went on, in a confident tone. Adroitly slipping in, "It would make your Aunt Alice equally happy, too, to see her two loved children united; for I've long wished that such a thing might be."

"It's very flattering to know that Gerald loves me so, Auntie, indeed it is;—Rob does too—said Alice, proudly; "and if there had been no one else, I believe I could have returned it, for he's been so very kind. And then *you've* always been so good to me, that it's hard, *much* harder than I can make you understand, I fear, to refuse to do as you both wish"; continued the grateful girl. "But Auntie, I love Rob so, that I *can't* give *him* up; indeed I can't; ask *anything* of me but *that!*" she pleaded. Her now brimming eyes

and faltering voice, her appealing, sweet young face so clouded with sadness, moving the heart of her distracted aunt so deeply, filling it with such remorse for the cruel sacrifice for which she had asked, that for the moment, love and sympathy for the unhappy girl triumphed over her great anxiety for the future well-being of her unfortunate husband; and with answering tears dimming her own eyes, Mrs. Nichols pressed the girl affectionately to her heart as she replied, soothingly, "There; there; don't cry! don't cry, Alice! Why not for *world's* would I have you give Rob up for Gerald, if your heart's so bound up in him as all *that*! I supposed you had both outgrown your childish fondness for each other, and didn't *dream* of such a thing as your being engaged. We'll go home at once, Honey," she promised, cheerfully; "and what a happy surprise it will be for your Uncle George to see his dear little girl again so soon."

But as 'twere by magic, the mere speaking of her husband's name in such a connection, flashed before the mind of the repenting woman an alarming realization of the failure of her important mission; and with it came the harrowing vision of a broken down, despondent old man at home, bravely though vainly struggling against overwhelming odds to reinstate himself, and be prepared to give a good account of his stewardship. *Instantly*, the *stronger* love again predominated, deciding her, once for all, to the playing of her trump card—a *merciless* playing, if need

be—thus far held in reserve, and to the last, with the hope that it might not be needed. “Yes, your Uncle is *very fond* of you, Alice”; she resumed impressively; with scarce a second’s break in the conversation, although in a changed, strange voice. “There’s *nothing* he wouldn’t do for you; *I wonder if you love him as much?*” she questioned slowly, yet with an intense eagerness. And placing her hands heavily upon the shoulders of her companion as she spoke, Mrs. Nichols studied the expression of her face almost ravenously with *searching* eyes. Eyes which seemed to burrow into the very farthest depths of the frank, expressive one’s before her, as though to find there at least the *shadow* of the girl’s inmost thoughts.

“Why Auntie!” was the quick, whole-souled rejoinder; “I couldn’t love Uncle George more if he was my father; he’s been so lovely to *me* always, and then think of all he did for dear *Papa*; why I’d give my *life* for him if—”

“Then *save* him, Alice, by marrying Gerald!” broke in the older woman, with imploring desperation.

“*Save* him!—by marrying *Gerald*!” repeated the puzzled girl in surprise. “I—I—don’t understand, Auntie!”

“To be sure not, dearie”! returned the other tolerantly; now tenderly folding an arm about the girl. “So let’s sit right down here together while I explain. Now listen!” And with obediently attentive, though it must be confessed, dense ears,—for business details

were as Hindustanee to her and speculation an utterly unknown science—Alice Nichols listened to an unintelligible, distinctively feminine jumble, about ‘bulls’ and ‘bears’ and ‘plunging’ and ‘selling short May wheat’ and ‘your Uncle George’ and ‘a corner’ and ‘Gerald’ and ‘\$75,000’ and ‘a crash,’ *et cetera*; expressions of which the narrator herself but dimly comprehended the meaning, but which she recalled from her husband’s confession to her of his great losses; the whole topped off with another frantic appeal to “*marry Gerald and save your Uncle!*”

“But I don’t think I quite know yet, please, Auntie”; faltered the girl, with a still more mystified look as the exciting story was concluded. “Why I didn’t know that they had any shorter wheat in May than any other time of the year. And what did they have animals for where they sold it? Was it out at the stock yards?”

“O, no, no, my dear child, it wasn’t out at the stock yards!” corrected Mrs. Nichols quickly; with a faint smile. “The ‘bulls’ and ‘bears’ aren’t really animals, you know; they’re men; they must be, for I distinctly remember your uncle’s saying that he had always stood in with the ‘bears,’ although, now I come to think of it, whenever his mind wandered during his long illness, he would grieve about having been ‘gored and trampled to death by the ‘bulls.’ But those are only nicknames, I take it, for the men who manage the thing. It seems to have happened on a certain cor-

ner down on La Salle Street; in some big warehouse, I suppose, for it must take an *immense* building, you know, Alice, to hold such great quantities of wheat; even if it *was* short."

"Ye—es, I'm sure it must"; assented the girl, rather vaguely, though evidently much impressed by the statement. "But what corner was it, Auntie? And what did Uncle George 'crash' into when he fell? Was that what made him so sick, last year?"

"Yes, and is fast killing him!" and the woman paused for a moment, quite overcome at the remembrance.

"But you don't seem to understand exactly yet, Alice"; she began presently. "He didn't *fall* from anywhere; '*plunging*' means buying a *whole lot* more wheat than you've got money to pay for; and must be a *very* bad thing to do. But I confess, Alice, it's far from clear to me, either; for you know I'm just as ignorant of business details as you are. Your uncle has always attended to everything of the kind, and I've never bothered my head to grasp them. All I *do* know, dearie is that he used all of his *own* money, and then took a whole lot of *Gerald's* and used that, too, and that it's *all gone*." The pitiful wail with which the closing statement was concluded being very touching.

"But how would my marrying Gerald bring any of it back, Auntie?" asked the girl, innocently.

"It wouldn't bring any of it back, dearie, but *your*

fortune would surely reconcile Gerald to the loss of his own, and keep him from making trouble for your Uncle George. Of course, he shouldn't have used Gerald's money at all, you know; but he somehow expected to make barrels more out of it, and Gerald, of course, would have gotten every penny of the increase. Other people wouldn't believe that though, and he could be sent to prison for it if it was known," she finished; visibly shuddering at the horrifying thought.

"But Gerald surely wouldn't tell of it and make such trouble as that for our uncle, Auntie! why I couldn't like him a *bit* any more if I thought he could be so cruel and ungrateful!" returned the girl, excitedly. "I'm sure *I* wouldn't if it was *my* money; I should know he didn't do it purposely. And I know *Rob* wouldn't, either, if it was his."

"But men aren't like women, dearie"; replied the other; ignoring the proud reference to Rob's magnanimity; "they're selfish naturally. Not that Gerald's any more so than the average man, probably," she hastened to add, "but you see he's grown up with expectations, and accustomed to the comforts and even luxuries of life which it would be very hard for him to do without, with his cultured tastes. Besides, no one could blame him for demanding what was lawfully his own. In less than two years from now, his fortune's due him, and naturally he's banking on it. It will be out of the question for it to be gotten together;

then comes exposure, disgrace, a felon's cell, and a broken heart for your noble uncle. O, Alice, *save him*!" she now pleaded, anew.

"I'd be both proud and happy to save him, Auntie"; was the warm-hearted answer; "but it won't be necessary for me to marry Gerald to do it. Uncle George can have all he needs of *my* fortune to pay him with, even if it takes the whole of it. I know *Rob* won't care if I haven't a penny; and I'll tell Uncle George so the minute we get home. So don't worry any more, Auntie dear," she concluded comfortingly; patting her aunt affectionately upon the cheek as she spoke.

"My dear child," now replied the elder, with manifest appreciation, "that's certainly a very sweet and lovely spirit, but you couldn't help your uncle in that way, for he would go to prison, to a gallows in fact, before that he would touch a penny of yours. And you must not let *him* know that I've told you of his predicament, Alice"; she cautioned, quickly. "Nor any one else either; not even Gerald if you should decide to marry him; remember that, Alice; *never!* Oh, why *can't* you make up your mind to do as I wish, dearie?" she went on again, appealingly; "it's really the *only* way in which you can help your uncle, and Gerald's not distasteful to you in any way, I can see that. You know what an agreeable companion he is, and he's handsome, clever, talented, industrious, and loves *you* to distraction. You'd be proud of him, Alice, and happy with him; I'm *sure* you would."

"But I don't *love* him, Auntie, and one should marry only for love."

"You'd quickly learn to, though, dearie"; persisted her aunt, confidently; "and Gerald's so sure of winning your love, that he's willing, *glad* to give all at first. *Many* girls marry on that basis, Alice; I'm sure I had never *thought* of such a thing as loving your uncle when he asked me to be his wife, and see what a perfect success *our* union has been."

A moment of anxious waiting for a reply to this last argument, and then the sweet girl spoke, softly and slowly, and *very* wistfully, and said: "Mamma Manning has told me of how fondly she, and my own dear mother, always wished and hoped that Rob and I would love and marry."

And to this staggering allusion there was also no immediate response; for the conscience of the elder smote hard within her at this gentle reminder of the well-known fact. Heart and voice alike, for the moment, failing, once more her splendid resolution faltered; and when, by a truly great effort, she had at length silenced the inward monitor, and with a mild persuasiveness had gone on to say, "True, dearie, and yet I can easily believe that your own dear mother would want her little girl to be very sensitive to the call of *duty*, as well as very zealous in the performance of it"; even as she craftily delivered herself of the honeyed words, the recreant, scheming woman was riven by a shrinking and cowering of soul before the

accusing thought, "who am *I* to prate of duty? How am I fulfilling *mine* towards this lone, motherless child?"

"But what about, Rob, Auntie? And my love for him and my promise?" now argued the troubled girl, with much concern. "I want to do everything for Uncle George that I can honorably, you must know that; but don't you think it would be wrong for me to go back on my word? Rob might *never* get over it; in fact, I don't think he ever would, Auntie, and it seems to me that I ought to think of him, too. Hard as it would be for *me*, it would be still harder for *him*, for while *I* should have the comfort of knowing that I had saved uncle and pleased you and Gerald, *he* would have absolutely nothing to comfort *him*."

"It would be a disappointment to Rob, of course, dearie," admitted the other, graciously. "But then you know marrying one's first love is the exception in life, not the rule; so that he would be but one of the great majority, after all." And following an almost imperceptible pause, she resumed, with almost cruel carelessness, "There's little danger of its breaking his heart, though, Alice, for young hearts are plastic, and Rob's young, in fact a mere boy; and a *boy's* heart is *very* easily mended. He'd soon forget all about you, no doubt, and be loving somebody else as much, or even more, than he now *thinks* he does *my* sweet girl."

"Then I *can't* do it, Auntie!" now exclaimed the tor-

tured girl, as she burst into tears; "for just the mere *thought* of Rob's loving anyone else, makes me turn oh! so sick and faint"! And burying the agonized face from which every vestige of color had fled, in her hands, the over-wrought girl here gave way to an uncontrollable fit of most violent weeping.

Fearful of weakening, Mrs. Nichols now forcibly steeled her heart against the great pity for her niece and the almost over-mastering promptings to expressions of sympathy, which surged within it; and when at last the crying had ceased, and the bowed head once more been raised,—the pent-up feelings somewhat relieved by the indulgence— she said wearily, not so much in a chiding as in an utterly despondent and pitifully impotent tone, "Well, Alice, there's nothing more that I can say to you; no other or stronger appeal that I can make. I confess I had hoped for better results, for I had really believed that you loved your uncle, and that in such a desperate crisis as *this*, that love would be great enough to outweigh every other and selfish consideration. But I was mistaken, it seems, and there is now nothing before us but *ruin* and *disgrace*." Her despairing sigh was truly heart-rending to hear. Then, a full and *maddening* realization of the hopelessness of the desperate situation seeming to fasten itself upon her, the bitterly disappointed woman added quickly, as a relentless, parting shot, "While I could wish sincerely that it might be so, Alice, it would be farcical for me to express the

hope that you and Rob may be happy together, for I shall still believe *you* to be possessed of too much heart for that, when the disgraced, heart-broken uncle whom you *might* have saved, shall be ending his days in Joliet."

But the random shot had gone straight home, and pierced to the very core, the tender, loving heart of the now conquered girl. "*Don't! O, don't*, speak of such a fate as *that* for my dear, good uncle!" she protested, frantically, as the other ceased speaking. "I'll save him! *indeed* I will, Auntie! I'll marry Gerald no matter *whose* heart it might break!" adding as an after-thought, "that is, if he still wants me to."

"Of *course* he wants you to, dearie!" put in the astonished but relieved woman, heartily; her face—from which years seemed to have already dropped, together with the deep carved lines put there by crushing anxiety—all aglow, and at once irradiated by the happiest of smiles. And as she folded her niece to her bosom and kissed her again and again, she continued, tremulously, "May God reward you as you deserve for this sweet sacrifice, my dear, noble girl! Oh, that you could look into your Auntie's heart and see the relief and joy with which you have filled it"! After which, looking hurriedly at her watch, "What! ten-thirty"? she ejaculated in surprise. "Why how long we have been talking! Run to your room quickly, child, and rest a bit before you dress; your Cousin Gerald will be here shortly to take us to breakfast."

When Alice Nichols re-entered the little parlor an hour later—or thereabout,—aside from an unusual paleness, her lovely face bore no trace of the terrible ordeal through which she had been passing. It had undergone a noticeable change, but it was no less beautiful; rather was it the more so, although its gay, girlish, yet always ethereal beauty, seemed suddenly to have taken on a full —albeit a premature—ripeness, unnatural in one of her years and inexperience. The youthful, eager expectancy seemed somehow to have died away and been supplanted by a settled calm. Seemingly a contented one, but nevertheless pathetic in one so young. Yet from out the angelic eyes, and beautifying the entire countenance, shone a sustaining exaltation; for in the interim, like the women at the Sepulcher, she had sought and ‘seen the Lord.’

CHAPTER VII.

A MARRIAGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

“No, mother, she has **lied** to me; played me **false**; made me **forever** a laughing-stock among my fellows; and I want **never** to hear her **hated** name **again**.”

Next day the brilliant sparkle of a new and costly gem upon the finger of the girl, told of a second proposal and an acceptance; and when, but a month later, this same jeweled ring was seen guarding a heavy, plain gold band, one knew that happenings had been rapid since that fateful hour of seemingly invincible necessity, in which our dear, young friend had so nobly said to self, ‘Get thee behind me’!

Yet the seeming undue haste had been satisfactory to them all. The proud and happy lover had been most impatient to possess his bride. The duenna, anxious for release from chaperonage, that she might return to husband and home, and doubly anxious also, for the tying of the ‘Gordian Knot,’ which, with relieving certainty, would transfer to the hand, the bird yet fluttering in at least partial, and therefore dangerous liberty in the bush.

‘If ’twere well when it were done, then ’twere well it were done quickly,’ was the admonishing thought kept ever in view by her; and although at times, ’tis

true, a disquieting apprehension as to the ultimate and absolute wellness of the proceeding would provokingly 'butt in'—as she declared impatiently to herself—to disturb her serenity, it had always been quickly banished by a pitiful, home vision; and the plea of the lover for haste had therefore found in her a ready and powerful advocate.

As for the girl, since it had been to please others, not herself, that she had consented to take the irrevocable step, her attitude had been passive to a degree. Capitulation, had been for *her* the important part of the transaction; the time of final and complete surrender, be it earlier or later, but a mere bagatelle; hence, their wishes in the matter had been hers.

With means at her command, and the merchandise of the world spread out before them in that world's Emporium, it had been a simple enough undertaking to procure a suitably elaborate *trousseau* at short notice; and following the required civil marriage of the previous day, on a sultry August noon, a richly and fashionably dressed, though very sedate little bridal party of three, repaired by appointment to the American Chapel; and there, shamefully cheated out of all the accompanying fuss and feathers that are the inalienable birthright of every young, beautiful and wealthy girl, at her wedding,—so inexpressibly dear to her heart at the time, so rich in lingering, happy memories,—Alice Nichols had been given away by the very aunt under whose auspices the *brilliant, joyous*

wedding of her late mother had come off a generation before; and in deference to a romantic wish of the bride to spend her honeymoon in one of the countries visited and most enjoyed by her loved parents upon their wedding journey, the new-made pair had at once set out for Switzerland.

Unspeakably relieved and deeply thankful for the so speedy and successful termination of her diplomatic mission, Mrs. Nichols, on the following day, bade a glad goodbye to Paris, and set her face once more homewards; a-flutter with impatience to carry to her embarrassed husband full details of the final climax to what,—so she significantly told him—*she* considered “a most fortunate attachment.”

Now, Alice—and with reason—had justly pleaded with her aunt to be allowed to make an exception in Robert’s case, and divulge the reason for her most extraordinary action in renouncing him. “I *can’t* have him and Mamma Manning think me fickle, faithless, Auntie”; she had tearfully urged. And to pacify the girl, consent had been reluctantly given; with the foxy stipulation, however, that the information should come through Mrs. Nichols herself. “I don’t blame you in the least, Alice, for feeling as you do about it,” she told the girl, indulgently, “and for your sake it’s but right that Robert should know. I believe that we can trust him with our tremendously vital secret. But it would surely be a very hard and trying ordeal for *you* to write him, dearie; beside, now that you are Gerald’s

fiancée, you two should carry on no further correspondence, whatever, you know. Just leave the matter to me, honey; I'll write and explain the whole situation to Mrs. Manning at once."

With unquestioning confidence, Alice had then commenced a nervously agitated counting of the days which must elapse before the expected answer might arrive. Even up to the very hour of her marriage had the trustful girl comforted herself with the sweet hope of receiving some word of forgiveness; some encouraging, soothing approval of her course, even,—she at times dared to hope,—or at the least, some little parting message of good wishes and good will, for all of which she most hungrily longed. But, of course, none such had ever come; and expectation and hope finally dying out, O, how the young heart had sickened; oppressed with its most desolating sense of utter loneliness, because of this estrangement from her dearest and best beloved friends.

Yet with a truly martyr-like fortitude and endurance, the noble girl had kept the secret of her bitter disappointment deep hidden in her own heart, strengthened always by the approving consciousness of a loving duty accepted and discharged, and had gone to her loveless marriage with apparent cheerfulness; determined to acquit herself creditably in the new, complex and delicate relationship upon which she was about to enter. Hopefully, also, had she gone, and without misgivings; for surely, if seemingly irre-

proachable habits in a lover, open and adoring admiration, tenderest solicitude, and constantly, the most fervid declarations of love, were safe and reasonable evidences upon which to build, then scarce might a girl ever have gone to the arms of a husband with such confident hope for the happy married life, which *must*, it would seem, follow their union; Gerald having always been pleasing to her as a friend, it will be remembered. Thus, save for the first and awful wrench to this sensitive, loving nature, one might have felt her case to call for but little, if any of sympathy; not any of pity.

Upon his aunt, too, had the behavior of the young man created a like favorable impression, particularly gratifying to her in view of the former doubts as to his worthiness; his love for Alice seeming so deep and true as to completely over-shadow self. "If it only lasts," she would muse thoughtfully, at times, "Gerald will surely have been transformed by the mighty power of love." On the eve of his wedding she had counseled the prospective bridegroom with great and touching earnestness, and told him of her high hopes for happiness in his married life; particularly urging the importance of *unselfishness* in his new relation.

"It is by the exercise of that virtue alone, Gerald, that you will win and keep the love of your wife, but believe me, the game will be well worth the candle. Oh, be kind and good to her always, my dear boy,"

she importuned him, tearfully; "for if ever a man had a beauty and a saint as well for a wife, it will surely be you. I confess there was a time when I thought her far too good for you, and hesitated to use my influence in your behalf; but I have been well satisfied and much pleased with appearances since we came over, and if there is no change upon your part, I can foresee for you and her a truly model life together. *Don't* disappoint me, my dear boy, *don't* disappoint me"! she pleaded; "for if you *should* make her life unhappy and break her heart, as your father did your poor mother's,—and to be frank with you, Gerald, you are wonderfully like him in many ways,—I could never forgive you, or myself, for having helped you to win her. You've certainly drawn the capital prize, Gerald; now guard it well, by guarding against *selfishness*; which—pardon my plain speaking,—has always been your besetting sin. You love Alice *very deeply*, do you not, my dear boy"?

"Love is a *feeble* word, Auntie"; replied the young man, soberly. And with his usual extravagant emphasis went on, "I *adore* her! I *worship* her. As I've repeatedly told her, my life is laid at her feet. I realize, fully I think, what a prize I've drawn, and furthermore, I realize also that but for your effective intervention I should never have won her. What can I ever do to repay you, Auntie"?

"My help has been gladly given, and has been purely a labor of love, my dear boy," returned the unsus-

pected schemer, blandly—love for whom it was of course inexpedient to state; the man was free to draw what inferences he chose—"and I want no pay other than that you be *good and true* to my dear girl; that is all I ask of you, Gerald"; she finished, with eyes that glistened with sincere emotion. And then, with a seemingly playful though intended threatening, "If you don't, and I hear of it, look out for squalls."

From the foregoing interview we catch a glimpse of the unmistakably deep love of Mrs. Nichols for her orphaned charge, as well as the intense anxiety felt for her welfare. Yet, how contradictory is human nature; and 'what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive.'

Surely never was this axiomatic truth more clearly illustrated than in the case of this misguided woman at this time; for in the unworthy carrying out of her unworthy project, she had been obliged to practice upon her loved niece the very cruelest deception. From the time her promise of a full and immediate explanation to Mrs. Manning of the girl's peculiar position and dutiful sacrifice had been made, *certain* of discovery and fearful of the miscarrying of her plans, should Alice continue to receive her absent lover's letters, she had felt it necessary to keep from the girl several of his last to arrive; since not until the tying of Hymen's knot should have made a dreaded, fatal change of mind impossible, did she purpose writing the promised explanation.

"I just *can't* have everything spoiled by them at this juncture"; was the way she reasoned regarding Robert and his mother. "*Of course*, they'd write her that 'tis an absurdly Quixotic idea, and do everything in their power to persuade her to retract; it's but natural that they should. As for the *complete* revelation for which the girl has stipulated, why that's a very serious matter, to be taken under advisement; I ought never to have made so sweeping a promise. It's quite out of the question, though, for me to inform them how matters stand *now*; I've simply *got* to keep them in the dark until everything's over, that's certain. Oh, well, what they don't know won't hurt them; bad news travels fast enough at its slowest, anyway." Thus did the hitherto irreproachable Mrs. Nichols cajole herself comfortingly, in extenuation of her unpardonable delinquency.

So it was, that not until after the return to her apartments on the day of that *extraordinary* wedding, after having—with intense relief and satisfaction,—seen the parties to it started upon the perilous journey of married life and safely on their travels, did she set about the performing of her most momentous and delicate task. But, as the result of repeated and imperative silencings, the whisperings of the 'still, small voice' had by that time become so faint, that the last important act upon French soil of this ordinarily most veracious and considerate woman, had been the pen-

ning of the following cruelly insinuating, misleading, unsympathetic, and calamitous letter :

“Paris—

“My Dear Mrs. Manning:” (she wrote.)

“Any written communication from *me*, would come to you somewhat in the nature of a mild surprise, I know. But this one will be even a trifle startling, I fancy, since it carries word of the marriage, at noon today, of Alice, to my nephew, Gerald Harding; this being the outcome of a *very deep* attachment which sprung up between the two, it seems,—although unknown to me at the time,—during the young man’s unexpected visit to us last summer; when they were much together, if you remember. The happy couple are now journeying towards Switzerland, where the honeymoon is to be passed.

Alice had thought to write you herself; but everything came about so suddenly, and the lovers being impatient for a speedy marriage, there was so much to be planned for and arranged in such a very little while, that the dear girl really seemed to find no time for any outside matters. Naturally, too, the little understanding which,—so she has told me—existed between your son and herself, made her shrink from the unpleasant duty; so my offer, finally, to relieve her of it, was gladly seized upon; hence this letter. A situation of that sort cannot but be exceedingly trying, we know, to one so sensitive and honorably inclined as she. Yet, when it is a case of heart answering to

heart, I really think that much allowance should be made for a girl who merely avails herself of the admitted privilege of her sex, and changes her mind; don't you?

The affair will be a bit of a disappointment to Robert, I presume, but I trust that both he and you will coincide with me in the above tolerant opinion.

Alice is well, and made a wonderfully handsome, charming bride. She and Gerald seem so *particularly* well fitted for each other, that I anticipate for them an exceptionally happy life together; and I feel sure that you will both join me in the hope that these my sanguine expectations, may be most abundantly realized.

With kind regards, very sincerely,

ALICE A. NICHOLS."

"P. S.—Announcement in regular form accompanies this under separate cover."

Truly, the pen *is* mightier than the sword; for never was there Damascus blade so cleverly fashioned, so finely tempered, that by a single stroke, however skillfully wielded, could cleave and lay apart the heart of an intended victim, so completely, as was the loving, utterly devoted heart of Robert Manning, by these few, comprehensive, brutal words of deadliest intent; and which seemed so incongruously to have fallen from the fragile point of a golden pen.

The cruel stroke had descended upon him without other preparation than a few weeks of suddenly in-

interrupted correspondence, for which he had at first, impatiently and fretfully held Uncle Sam responsible. Then the fear of illness or accident had crept in to worry and alarm; but, strange though it may appear, the youth had experienced no warning premonition as to the true cause for the girl's unexplained silence. Nor was it so strange, either; for as he read her recent—and always delightful—letters over and over and over again each day, did he not find them always overflowing with sweetest, most fervent expressions of love and loyalty, together with those thoughtful, satisfying and comforting accounts as to Gerald's attitude towards her? And to doubt *her sincerity*, would no more have occurred to the trustful youth, than to doubt the self-evident fact of living.

We purposely refrain from the rehearsing of any specific or vivid details of the effects of the awful shock of Mrs. Nichols' announcement, upon the youth; for even though time and space permitted, and language could be found or words coined, adequate to depict the mortal agony of soul through which he passed, the sacredness of such emotions would forbid, while their harrowing nature would make them but an unkind tax upon the sympathy of the reader. When we call to mind the fact, however, that Robert Manning's love for Alice Nichols had been *coeval* with *memory*, *deep* as *feeling*, and *sweeter* to him than *life*, before the eyes of our minds, at least in silhouette, there must appear a picture of the awful havoc

wrought in his constant young heart, by *such* a tearing out of it of the idol *always* enshrined there.

Stunned and dazed by the blow, the *full* effects of its crushing force were not at first so directly apparent. But as the melancholy days went by, and the indisputably damaging testimony contained in the fatal letter was over and over dwelt upon, digested, and compared with the *countless* loving,—but now, evidently perfidious,—professions of the girl, both verbally and in writing, Robert was seen to change. There was no longer a giving way to outbursts of emotion, nor was there any physical breakdown or mental collapse; his wounded pride, strong constitution and strong will, prevented either of these latter. But his heart seemed to petrify; to become as stone. Inheriting an unusually strong, self-reliant nature, the youth now appeared to wrap himself about as with a mantle in these characteristics; flouting even his mother's sympathy, and instantly angered when she—whose loyal heart *could* not lose its faith in Gertie's child, even while striving to bring comfort to her own,—would plead for a more charitable opinion of the offending girl.

"There's something more to this than we know, Robert; more than appears upon the surface," she would tenderly urge. "I know the girl too well to believe her wilfully capable of such an action. It has been Mrs. Nichols' doings, you may be sure of that; the woman's a born match-maker, and has always been

extravagantly fond of her nephew and indulgent to his whims. Suspend judgment, my son, until the matter's cleared up, as I feel sure it will be, some day."

But each appeal of the sort had but irritated the more, and brought forth the truly unanswerable fling: "She *married* him, didn't she? And no one can *compel* a girl to marry a man against her will. No, mother; I can see now how she has been deceiving me all along; she has *always* stood up for Gerald, whenever occasion offered; even in her last, hypocritical letter"; he would sneer, with the nausea of disgust. "And why? Because she was in love with him! And why was she in love with him? Because of his greater wealth, of course! Have we not been told that this attachment began *last summer*? The almighty dollar had already bought her faithless heart for *him*, even while she was vowing undying love for *me*. No, mother, she has *lied* to me! *played me false*! made me forever a laughing stock among my fellows! and I want *never* to hear her *hated* name *again*! if *you* have any love for me, you will cease to mention it in my presence"! he finally commanded.

And from that day, the sweet name which had hitherto been one to conjure with in that household, was heard there no more. Reminders of the girl were removed from sight by the mother, all tokens destroyed by the son; so bitter was his feeling. And with this bitterness of feeling Robert became also selfish in his sorrow, forgetful of the fact, that to his loving mother

the disappointment was scarcely second to his own, while, with the added burden that his well known, even though unadmitted sufferings entailed, *her* distress, differing from his own in nature though it was, was probably no less poignant.

To gratify his wish for the uninterrupted pursuit of his law studies, so anxious was he to finish in the shortest possible time, the unselfish mother had willingly agreed to remain in town that entire Summer; and impelled and cheered by an ever present vision of the dear one, for love of whom his ultra-ambitious efforts were being put forth, the eager, young student had found unmitigated delight in an almost gluttonous cramming of himself with the principles and precepts of Blackstone. But now, with the mainspring of motive all at once put out of commission, ambition lagged; the *tasks* of life, which had formerly been as *recreations*, became intolerably burdensome; while as for *pleasures*, it no longer held them.

Thus, unhappily and without show of improvement, matters had gone on for a considerable time; the worried mother seeing her former companionable, sunny-tempered boy, becoming daily more moody, morose, cynical; his faith in womankind all gone, with hard and bitter heart and words, declaring that he would never trust another, would never marry. And with a now full, and at last, truly sympathetic understanding of the pangs of disappointed love, his words brought again to mind a time and scene many years buried in

oblivion, when for love of *her*, another young man, although in a far different spirit, had made the self-same vow, which,—although she knew it not,—was still unbroken. For their paths had never since crossed, the son, because of her rejection, having changed his life plans and settled in the East, where the fond parents had soon followed him. Only in print had she for years heard his name mentioned; but wherever a great calamity had called for unselfish, heroic service,—a Johnstown flood, a New Orleans epidemic, a Charleston earthquake, a railroad horror, or what not,—always in the van of ministering angels to appear upon the scene, she had been proud to read the name of Dr. Harold Lincoln Gardiner; and she could but hope and pray that Robert's bitterness might in time be overcome, when *his* disappointment should haply have found solace in a *like* unselfish sympathy for the sorrows, and a ministering to the sufferings of others.

At length, hopeful that travel and a temporary change of scene and surroundings would aid in restoring her son to normal,—for although the Fall semester was now on, Robert would absent himself from class for days without excuse, and shutting himself up alone in his room would give way to a stubborn brooding over the hardness and injustice of his fate—the fond mother had proposed to him a respite of a few months from study and a trip to the Western coast; to California.

“Fred has been wanting you to come for so long, you know, dear,”—Fred being Fred Elliott, the playmate of childhood and the chum of after years, whose family had been for some little time residents of the city of San Francisco,—“and this is just the very time for you to go; you’ll have a splendid visit, and come back to me my own happy boy once more, I know”! declared the mother, confidently. And so, after much persuading, though with no show of interest or pleasure in the undertaking, Robert Manning had consented to do as his fond and anxious mother advised and wished.

Warmly received by the friends whose estimate of him had always been most flattering, and whose sympathy was equally deep and sincere, during a lengthy visit the youth was also royally entertained. But the gaping wound in his young heart healed not a whit, although a necessarily enforced show of cheerfulness would have indicated the contrary. Yet, as his visit neared its end, with this unhealed wound as livid as when first inflicted, and more and more inflamed, the thought of a return to the always painfully suggestive atmosphere and associations of his home city became unutterably obnoxious to the youth; and he longed for a life amid the distractions and *possible* infection of the larger, light-hearted city, sitting so majestically upon the picturesque hills that bordered the Golden Gate.

But, knowing how deep-seated was the love of his mother for the spot to which her heart was bound by

so many imperishable ties, Robert for a season could not bring himself to propose the change of residence for which he longed. Yet always as he asked himself the question, 'was there ever a time when *my* welfare and happiness were not dearer to her than her own?' there was but one answer to be heard to the preposterous query. So at length, the proposition had been made; with the result that after a four months' separation—which both had keenly felt,—the selfless mother had joined him in the city of his choice.

A new and attractive home was there set up in a cozy flat overlooking the beautiful and imposing bay, whose vast expanse of sparkling waters had more than once tempted the unhappy youth to seek surcease from the intolerable burden of his disordered emotions, within her chilly depths. But, as the graceful waves of the mighty ocean, daily washing in and out over the sand-strewn shores upon which they tarried, left a welcome cleansing and refreshment in their wake, "so, in time," dreamed the now hopeful mother, "Lethe's waves, by a merciful washing in and out over the wreck-strewn shores of memory, will bring refreshment, and at least a *measure* of easement, to the nagging pain in my poor boy's heart."

The catastrophe, however, had brought more than a change of residence to the Manning's; it had brought also a change in Robert's life work. Study, which had before been a passion with him, had now grown distasteful. "I simply *cannot* settle down to it again,

mother"; he had urged, when asking for his parent's sanction to a change. "I must have something more immediately distracting. I want to go into mercantile life. Mr. Elliott has influence, you know, and can secure for me a very acceptable position, in which there will be good opportunity for advancement if I fill the bill, which he seems to have no fears about my doing; and the salary"—mentioning the amount—"is certainly good for a greenhorn. Now what do you say, mother dear"? And what the mother said may be gathered from the fact that Law and a further college course, were dropped, and the son had instead entered upon the duties of a junior clerkship with a leading commercial company.

Although now unnaturally subdued and repellently distant in manner, one might have felt proud, indeed, to know the fine, manly, capable looking fellow who, seated at a desk in its office, industriously pored over the confusing array of figures daily placed before him, and have felt equally confident of his making good. And one who knew the *cause* of this unnaturalness, while feeling deeply for the youth, must have as deeply regretted that they dared not ask him for a few, comforting words, to send to a shamefully misjudged, and already, needy young matron, upon the other side.

CHAPTER VIII.

THREE HAPPENINGS.

“ ‘Great Scott, Sis, she’s fainted! Let’s get her out of here quick!’ ”

It is the half-filled *bottle*, and the *head* with: ‘Unfurnished Apartments to Let,’ that make ever the most to-do about discharging their scant and puny contents. Also, ‘talk’s cheap’; and it is the vacuous, hollow *heart*, that is ever the most conspicuous and vociferous in its protestations of affection. The roaring, combustible passion which burns incessantly at fever heat, soon burns itself out. The inextinguishable, smoldering fire of true, enduring love, emits but occasional assuring flashes, but permeates and warms the entire heart; making it literally ‘too full for utterance’; unselfish deeds, not idle words, are its language. Thus it is not always the most impetuous and ardent wooer whose sentiment is the truest and deepest, but ‘vicey versey and the same,’ to quote Samantha Allen.

These are but generalities, however. To get right down to personalities, Gerald Harding had not been long wed, before his showy, combustible imitation of love had burned itself out; to dying embers had succeeded a splotch of cold, gray ash. As of old, from

the days of childish indulgences to those of love's *amours*, the pleasure of the chase had begun to wane with capture and possession; and the surprised, young wife was early made aware of the change.

In their journeyings, the beauty and charming personality of the sweet bride had naturally attracted notice, and at times, called forth evidences of that harmless admiration which is ever beauty's accepted tribute from the world. What less could the man expect? But now the innate selfishness of nature which could not long be held in check, began cropping out, to show itself in an unreasoning jealousy;—for unprovoked, unwarranted jealousy is but selfishness gone to seed. The opportunities for many agreeable associations had therefore been curtailed and their enjoyment spoiled, by the man's open and even rude resentment of any courtesies offered to his wife; thereby not only humiliating and mortifying, but largely depriving her of those legitimate social pleasures to which every woman has a right.

It was the same after their return to Paris. Settled in a handsome home and possessed of great natural attractions, Alice had been quickly surrounded by a circle of admiring acquaintances, from among whom a choice few of most enjoyable intimates might have been culled; but here, too, the continual and contemptible jealousy of the dog in the manger husband interfered. Yet although the honeymoon,—which had not been all honey, it will be seen,—had in this respect de-

feated the expectations of our deserving young friend, in her innocence, the girl had set down her husband's unreasoning jealousy to his deep, extravagant love; and had therefore found it in her heart not only to overlook and forgive the unhappiness which his many annoying demonstrations had caused her, but even to strive to return his supposed affection. Not that Robert was forgotten, or that she could ever feel for any other that worshipful, self-effacing love, which for him had been born with her and would ever remain alive, entombed though it must be in her heart. But the same, exalted sense of devotion to a supposed duty which had led to relinquishment, also set clearly before this conscientious young matron, the right of her husband to a sentiment as nearly approximating the former as might be possible; and had the man proven worthy, gratitude allied to this high sense of duty, would have at length inspired her with an abiding affection, scarce lacking the fervor of that lifelong love.

For Gerald was now her *all*, it must be remembered; every other tie having been severed, her bridges all burned. Only in her married life could happiness henceforth be hoped for; and it was therefore with alarm that Alice Nichols began to see and to feel evidences of the waning of her husband's impetuous love.

The simple-minded wife then took to upbraiding herself; certain the fault must lie at her door that she was becoming less attractive to him; 'although, not

even for Rob, could I have tried harder to please'; she would meditate ruefully upon occasion. Yet to win him back to the old, sweet ways, now became a passion with her. Her daily study was to look her prettiest, to be her sweetest. His wishes, his most unreasoning whims she had from the first deferred to; now they were even anticipated. But to no avail, for her self-abnegation was but a casting of 'pearls before swine'; and Gerald Harding was just the breed of swine to 'trample them under foot and turn again and rend' her.

The Cad! Even while objecting to the ordinary gentlemanly civilities being paid his wife, *his* feet were already itching for a return to the primrose path; whose fascinations were far more alluring to his decadent tastes, than the legitimate pleasures of a virtuous married life.

For Gerald Harding's bachelor habits had by no means been the spotless ones his fond aunt imagined. During her short stay in Paris, he had in the main kept aloof from his every day associates, as they had been warned to keep away from him; and appearances had therefore been satisfactory, as she had told him. But now, his market made, his aunt no longer there to catch on, his utterly unsophisticated young wife most easy to deceive, discretion had been thrown to the winds, and his handsomely appointed studio in the Boulevard *d'Atelier*, became again the *rendezvous* of a set impossible of presentation to a wife.

Alice had come upon one of these flashy, much bejeweled young beauties there one day, stretched out in careless abandon in a reclining chair, contentedly puffing at a cigarette. This was but a few months after the return from their wedding trip, when she had dropped in at the studio unexpectedly to while away a lonely hour in her husband's company. Gerald had not offered to introduce the girl, but at dinner, had taken pains to inform his wife that she was a model, posing for a coming cartoon.

"Such people are necessary to your work I presume, dear," replied the trustful wife, sweetly, "but I really can't help wishing that they weren't; I don't like to think of my husband being associated even professionally with any one so bold and unlady-like looking."

"One of the necessary munitions of war, Alice"; returned the man, nonchalantly; adding, "Art isn't *all* representations of angels and arch-angels, white-robed vestal virgins, and their uninteresting ilk, you must know, and my present branch in particular is not exactly a camping ground for saints and seraphs. Of course, I'm aiming and working toward higher things, but I know perfectly the class of subjects necessary to my work *now*," he continued rather tartly, "and there's no need of your giving yourself any concern, whatever, about the matter, for it's out of your domain, entirely. Art is an artist's mistress; and when a girl's fool enough to marry one, she must

expect to take second place; that's all, and this is perhaps as good a time as any for you to learn it. And what is more, Alice," he went on, "I would prefer that you kept away from my studio, for it interferes with my work. Breaks in upon a valuable train of thought, or else scatters a bunch of record-breaking mind pictures, like as not, and the same inspiration never comes to a fellow again; so please don't come down any more."

And the bitterly disappointed young wife, who could have hoped her company to have even proven an 'inspiration,' hurt, both by his words and manner, yet with no thought of doubt as to the sincerity of her husband, had from that day kept away as requested.

It was not very long afterward, however, that she had been shocked to come upon Gerald openly driving with the same, loud creature on the *Bois*, one afternoon, after having excused himself from accompanying her—as had been his daily custom up to that time—with the plea of 'too much work to be done'; and as before, there had been a plausible excuse for the occurrence.

"These models are in great demand," he explained that evening, 'and independent as hogs on ice' in consequence; have to handle them with gloves all the time, or a competitor's got them before you can say 'Jack Robinson.' The girl hasn't her equal on the market for my class of work, she's so versatile;

and so I *have* to put up with her devilish, impertinent airs, and humor her once in a while. Why she actually threatened to quit and go over to *LeBarge*, this afternoon, if I wouldn't take her for a drive; and I can't afford to lose her. I'd rather you didn't drive any more when I'm unable to go with you, Alice," he put in foxily; "It doesn't look well for a woman to be on the *Bois* alone, to my way of thinking, and I don't care to have *my* wife seen there without *me*; an afternoon without a drive occasionally won't kill you I guess, anyway," he concluded shortly.

But why multiply exasperating instances? Why further dwell or enlarge upon an unpleasant subject? This was but one of many, oft recurring, similar tragic cases, wherein an innocent, trusting girl, a selfish, heartless man of the world, a cruel, faithless husband, a neglected, unhappy wife, represent the *dramatis personae*. Surely the *adult* reader's own knowledge of life and the world—and this book is not intended for kindergartners—can supply the many omitted details, with all their sad concomitants; not forgetting even that especially pitiable one in this case, that Alice Harding was a stranger in a strange land, and as a result of a set of most *deplorable* circumstances, lonely at heart, beyond expression.

Thus passed a *first*, and indeed, disappointing year of married life for this most worthy wife; a year in which a degree of happiness, at least, partially commensurate with her great sacrifice, had been not only

hoped for, but confidently expected, from the extravagantly flattering, tender way in which she had been wooed and won. But which, alas! had well nigh crushed out hope, and banished expectation.

Then, suddenly, three happenings, unlooked for but vitally important, following each other in quick succession, had broken the wearisome and worrisome monotony of Alice Nichols' life, and in one particular at least, had changed its course. First, their Uncle George had died, very unexpectedly, six months before an accounting must be made to his foster-son and nephew; his death, no doubt, hastened by chagrin and worry, perhaps even by fear. Immediately upon the receipt of the sad news, Gerald had taken a flying trip to America, alone—a voyage at the time being hardly advisable for the wife—to look after his interests.

Now the fellow's fortune, we feel loath to state, was by this time *all* gone; for during the short, diplomatic absence of his wife in Europe the previous year, Mr. Nichols, hardly responsible mentally at the time, in desperation such as impels a drowning man to clutch at a straw, had put what remained of it from his former bad investments, into another—to his mind—alluring 'fly'; and had again lost. Lost for himself, as well; for in order to raise the necessary money for his own part of the deal, he had placed a second mortgage upon their city home, which, because of the dangers of travel, he had persuaded his wife

to deed to him before going away. The lifeless remains of the man had no sooner been buried, than the property—which would but little more than satisfy their claims—had been seized upon by the mortgagees, rendering Mrs. Nichols herself homeless, other than her distant mountain cottage, and penniless, but for a paltry insurance policy that she held. There was nothing left for Gerald.

And now the utter and despicable heartlessness of the man became apparent. True, he had been hit hard, and the proximity, nay the possibility even of the blow having been undreamed of, had of course made it still more severe. But he was at this time in the very prime of young manhood with all its golden opportunities, considered master of a profession capable of yielding both fame and fortune, and through the foresight and influence of his devoted aunt, married to an heiress as well. But the now pitiable position of that once wealthy aunt, all the years of patient, loving care bestowed upon him by both his uncle and herself, and her last good offices in his behalf, were, all lost sight of by Gerald. He raged in a very tempest of disappointment and fury, with sympathy or thought for none but self; his conduct in this extremity proving him to be, indeed, without a single redeeming trait.

“After the villainous way in which I’ve been buncoed”—as he so brutally expressed himself to the crushed and sorrowing woman—upon learning of his

loss, "you might be very thankful that the Almighty didn't spare him to fall into *my* clutches; he'd have paid dear for his damned rascality if he had, relation or no relation! As for Alice's fortune," he went on, with a mocking laugh, in answer to the reminder that *it* would compensate for the loss of his own, "do you take me for such an infernal fool as not to have had that too, in time? In the name of the Lord, woman, what do you suppose I married the little simpleton for? It's very evident you don't know your precious nephew yet!"

And with no feeling of concern for the future of his unhappy foster-mother, Gerald Harding had raced back home, to make the life of his long-suffering wife even more miserably wretched than it had been before.

It was during her husband's brief absence in America, that the second event had occurred, the results of which had proven for a time a veritable oasis in Alice Harding's desert of existence. Now, although she had not inherited the artistic *talent* of her mother, the same deeply appreciative *love* of Art was hers, and many had been the hours and occasions since her marriage, in which her lonely, troubled heart, had found solace and the most satisfying companionship, in its uplifting, and to her, enrapturing environment.

One day at the Louvre—her frequent haunt—as she sat, oblivious to her surroundings, entranced anew before a masterpiece whose wonders and beauties she had often before devoured, a couple, bearing both

in manner and appearance all the unmistakable earmarks of culture and refinement, in age a little on the hither side of middle life, the man, uncommonly handsome and distinguished looking, the woman, plainer, had approached her; and with the natural grace and punctilious deference of a Frenchman, though evidently one of her own countrymen, the man had addressed her thus. "I trust you will pardon our intrusion upon your absorption, Madam"—he had quickly noted the wedding ring upon the ungloved hand which held her catalogue—"but that you are of the same nationality as ourselves is apparent; are you not from Denver, Colorado, may I ask?"

"Formerly," replied Alice, with the unhesitating frankness of a well-bred young woman meeting with well-bred strangers; "but since my marriage, Paris is my home. I was born and brought up in Denver, however."

"We felt morally certain of it"; now put in the lady, with a pleased and satisfied air. "We have noticed you here and at the Luxumbourg a number of times, and you bear such a very striking resemblance to a dear friend of many years ago at home—a Mrs. Clayton Nichols—that we could no longer resist the temptation to speak and inquire if you were not related to her; a descendant, perhaps."

"My own, dear mother," answered the other feelingly; "and surely it is a treat and joy to meet any old friends of hers. Whom have I the pleasure of addressing?" she asked, with a cordial smile.

The couple were even then presenting their cards, and as they did so, the gentleman remarked, "Our names are probably not familiar, for we have made our home upon this side since before you were born; but we knew your parents very well indeed, in those long past and exceedingly happy days when we were all young folks together."

"Your names are by no means unfamiliar to me," returned Alice, as she read the inscriptions on the engraved cards. And now offering her hand in the most friendly manner, she continued, "Nor are your faces unfamiliar, either, although I could not exactly place you at first. My dear mother always had photos of you among those of her most dearly remembered friends, and has often told me, Mr. Lindsay, of what a famous painter you had become. She and Papa were both always very proud to claim friendship with you."

"Their memories have always been as dear to me, as well"; replied our old friend Jack, with a gratified smile at the flattering and welcome intelligence;—for he it was, and Hattie, his devoted sister. "But from the tense in which you speak of them," he went on to add, in a tone of eagerly interested questioning, "I fear you have lost them."

"Yes, Mr. Lindsay," answered the lonely woman,—with even at that late date, an involuntary show of emotion—"it was my sad misfortune to have them both taken from me six years ago, and under extremely painful circumstances."

"We can feel for you then," rejoined Miss Lindsay, tenderly, "for we have passed through a like bereavement ourselves. Have you been long in Paris?" she asked. "And who is it our happy privilege to have met?"

"Mrs. Gerald Harding"; replied Alice. "I seem to be without a card," she went on;—vainly searching through a richly jeweled hand-bag for her case, while she spoke—and as the man noted down the address that she proceeded to give, she finished, "I hope you will both come to see me very often, for I feel that it is going to be such a perfect delight to have you for my friends. I have made but few as yet."

"Not the wife of the wonderful cartoonist, Mrs. Harding?" asked the man, in almost incredulous and seemingly unpleased surprise.

"The very same, Mr. Lindsay." And the young woman smiled proudly at the great compliment paid her husband. "You are certainly most kind to speak of his work so flatteringly."

"Your husband is a very clever man, Mrs. Harding"; returned the other, warmly. "We have known him—that is, by reputation," he explained—"for a considerable time." Then after a second's pause he added, "and we had also heard much about a very charming, young wife whom he married, something over a year ago; was it not? But we had never dreamed of meeting her, or of having this pleasure

of finding in her the daughter of our dear old friends. You are almost a perfect double of your beautiful mother, Mrs. Harding,"—he could not restrain himself from saying—"and believe me, acquaintance, friendship with you would be more than valued by us, because of that resemblance, alone."

"And I shall be much pleased to have you become more intimately acquainted with my husband," returned Alice. "I am sure it will be an agreeable surprise to him upon his return to find that we have met. He is in America at present, but not for long. He has grown such a very busy man of late, that I seem to see not much of him, when at home; but of course I am especially lonesome during his absence; so *do* favor me with your company as much as possible, won't you? Come and dine with me tomorrow; I can't tell you the great happiness it will bring me."

This hearty invitation was accepted with becoming alacrity, for the meeting with the young woman had been as genuine a pleasure to the Lindsays, as to herself. The memory of their by-gone friendship and intimate association with Gertrude Warfield, had been a sweet and cherished one to them both, through all the passing years; for in losing the girl of his choice, this man had neither been rejected nor jilted, it will be remembered. His case had been a disappointment, pure and simple; hence there had been no cause or room for resentment. Yet though a simple disappointment, as we have said, the disappointment had been

by no means a 'simple' one to Jack Lindsay. His longing, constant heart, had been so completely centered in his sister's fascinating friend, that his love, though hopeless, had been *undying*; its indestructible flame had burned so steadily on, that famous, wealthy, handsome though he was, and much sought after as he had therefore naturally been, the man was in consequence, still a bachelor. Hattie Lindsay, too, had remained single; *she* was not of the marrying kind; and between the brother and sister, a beautiful, compensating comradeship existed.

Now when the man stated to Mrs. Harding that he had acquaintance with her 'clever' husband, knew him 'by reputation,' he could have put it yet stronger, and added that that reputation, as he knew it, was an unsavory one. His first words to his sister however, when he had rejoined her in the famous gallery after seeing that lady to her waiting carriage—and spoken also with an undisguised show of indignation—were, "Great Scott, Sis! to think of Gertie's daughter being the wife of that scalawag! Why, I can't reconcile myself to the thought of it, at all!"

"So *that's* the Harding I've heard you and some of our friends grill so unmercifully, is it?" exclaimed the other. "I remember George Carter's saying that there wasn't a vice but what he was addicted to, and that he hadn't a solitary redeeming trait."

"If he has, I've never heard it exploited. As to his vices, I believe there's *one* he hasn't attached him-

self to, as yet, and that's drink, and so he has no charity whatever, for a poor devil who is addicted to it. To hear him denounce an excess in that direction, one who didn't know, would imagine him, not simply a saint, but a saint run mad."

"'Hopes to atone for sins he's inclined to—by damning those he has no mind to'; I suppose."

"Very likely," nodded Jack. Then, "But where under the Sun could she have met him? She's very young, and he's been over here a long time."

"Didn't you notice what she said about him being a nephew of their Aunt, Mrs. George Nichols, of Chicago? queried the sister. "*She* probably made the match. She always had an ungovernable passion for that sort of thing, I know"; she continued. A bit spitefully too, it must be admitted; as though the recollection yet rankled, of how, in the days that were gone, *she* had been check-mated, repeatedly, by the lady in question.

"Well, he probably managed to pull wool over *her* eyes, too, then. He's a slick enough article to deceive most any one. But however it happened, it's a cruel shame, and I pity her from the very bottom of my heart. Why it's notorious how he tyrannizes over and neglects her, already. *We* must see all we can of her, Sis," the man went on, sympathetically, "and try to bring more or less of happiness into her life; for it's precious little beside sadness that *he'll* put there. I'm afraid we won't be very welcome acquaintances

however, after he gets back, for he hates me worse than poison, since I had him black-balled when he tried to get into our guild. If I had known who his wife was at the time though, Sis," he concluded, soberly, "that she was related to *her*, I couldn't have done it!"

"How *very much alike* they are"; he mused, rather than spoke. "The same glorious eyes, exquisite tinting, sunny hair, the same music in the voice, the same sweet smile, the same irresistible charm of manner. Sis," he burst out suddenly, "if I hear of any more of his cuttings up, I shall be tempted to thrash the hound within an inch of his life!"

Now the unexpected encounter at the Louvre, seemed more a Providence than accident for Alice Harding; for the great yearning of her heavy heart at the time, had been for *companionship*; while shortly, the crying need of her life, was for *friends*. Disinterested, leal, and loving friends, just such as now came to hand in these old-time family acquaintances; the exceeding opportuneness of its happening stamping it a God-send indeed, whose value to her proved fully equal to the joy and comfort which it brought.

Following her informal dinner to *them*, Alice had been carried off by her new-found friends to their artistic home in the *Champs Elysees*, and had there spent the happiest two weeks which she had known since the few well remembered ones of her very early married life. Upon arrival, her host had graciously

shown her—hung, sacred to himself, in his own private sanctum—the wonderful, life-size, life-like picture, for which her beautiful mother had unknowingly posed so many years before, and which had brought, first fame and then fortune to the unknown young painter, by discovering to him his latent capabilities. While she listened, breathless with astonishment and deepest interest, the lover-artist—for the first time—recounted to another, all the sweetly-bitter details of its romantic inspiration.

“It was a friendly, honorable rivalry, Mrs. Harding, for the favor of the loveliest earth-angel ever courted”; he told her at the last; “in which your worthy father had the advantage of priority. Had it not been for that, while I should then probably never have become much known as an artist, I shall always indulge the precious conceit that I would have known the prouder, and far happier distinction, of having been your father. You must look upon sister and me hereafter,” he continued, impressively, “in the light of parents; and if ever in need of sympathy, advice, or assistance of any sort, I want to feel that you will come to us as freely and unhesitatingly as though that sacred relationship *did* actually exist between us.” And gratefully indeed, had his most needy auditor promised to think of and feel towards the couple thenceforth, as the useful, good and *true* friends they fain would be.

Full of life and fond of it although no longer young,

the Lindsays had hosts of acquaintances, many of whom were now bidden to meet their fair young guest; and what with a constant succession of delightful entertainments at home, more or less of tripping about to places and scenes of interest before unknown to her, concerts and the opera,—for being a fine musician herself Alice was naturally a great lover of music—the two well filled weeks had flown by, with that regrettable haste for which all of our most precious, happiest seasons seem somehow to have such a provoking knack,—for ‘Father Time is deaf to all persuading; not a moment will he stay’—and had brought the friends to their last evening together; Gerald being due to reach home on the morrow. Friends who were to have come to them for a social hour had been prevented at the last from keeping the engagement; and not to miss a final occasion for the charming visitor from whom they were prepared to part with much regret, Jack had at once suggested the theatre.

“There’ll be no boxes to be had at this hour of course,” said he, “but we can probably pick up three pretty decent parquette seats”; so in the parquette the willing trio had been content to settle. Then came that third happening to which we have before alluded.

Now in accepting the gracious hospitality of her host and hostess, Alice Harding had done so, wisely determined, for the *nonce*, to rise above the depressing emotions with which the disappointing past had bur-

dened her heart, also the gloomy forebodings for the future which oppressed, and to give herself up unreservedly to the perfect and full enjoyment of the happy present; for knowing the disastrous revelation with its bitter disappointment in store for her absent husband, and certain that it would be taken very hard, his mood, upon returning, would be little conducive to domestic happiness, she well knew. If, therefore, a momentary shadow which involuntarily flitted across the bright, young face, at thought of the nearness of that return, was, perchance, caused by regret, who could wonder or blame?

Her fresh, unsurfeited enjoyment of pleasure was yet almost childish, in its whole-souled, outspoken appreciation; for having practically immolated youth by marrying from the schoolroom, Alice had known but little of its diversions, as yet, and upon this particular evening, the transported young woman had fairly *beamed* with happiness; *fascinated* by every feature of the long and splendid play, until, amid a burst of *thunderous* applause, the curtain had gone down before the last, short act.

In the contrasting stillness which followed, a conversation, carried on between two young women seated immediately in front of them,—who had but shortly before come in, and whose loud appearance and frequent distracting laughter, had from the first proclaimed them more anxious to be seen and heard than to see and hear—fell with painful distinctness upon the ears of our little party.

"Your shair ah-me—as these pollyvous call 'em—will be back soon now, won't he?" asked the first speaker.

"Which one?" inquired the other, innocently.

"O, come off now, Vi!" exclaimed her companion, shortly. "Don't try ter make out yer such a charmer that yer've got 'em by the dozen; yer know deuced well I mean Harding. When's he due?"

"Tomorrow"; was the brief and seemingly reluctant reply.

"And when does the bunch git that big blow-out and jambouree that he promised us before he went? that full dress affair yer know; collar and a pair of socks," returned the other, with an insinuating laugh, "I want ter git a yard er two of tarleton and a few spangles ready ter shine in."

"Don't ask *me* when it's to be!" curtly.

"Why, haven't yer heard from 'im?"

"A postal when he landed."

"Well who shall I ask then? Gramont, perhaps"; retorted the first speaker, maliciously; evidently piqued at her companion's uncommunicativeness. "She's better posted on the subject than you are any way, I guess," she went on. "We all know he's makin' a dead set for Mmle. Julie; had her meet him at Calais and go up to Liverpool to see 'im off. Ha! ha! didn't let *you* know about that nice little arrangement, I s'pose? O, you'll soon be a back number, Vi; don't fool yerself; he'll be solid with her now he's got the

dough; the Johnnies all have ter hand it out ter her in good big chunks, I can tell yer! He'd stick to 'is own countrywomen though if he'd a grain of sense in his empty head, fer it was a Frenchy come after me and played the deuce with 'im; bled 'im dry, then swiped 'is dimonds an' lit out. That was before *you* was fool enough ter throw yerself away on 'im."

"The cat!" hissed her listener, angrily.

"Oh, 'taint no use callin' the *girl* names, Vi, er lettin' yer angry passions rise, either"; returned the other, with a harsh, unsympathetic laugh. "Tempers aint becomin' ter your peculiar style o' beauty, an' they play hell with the digestion, besides. There's reason enough though, I guess"; she resumed after a second's pause; "fer I had a hunch that 'e'd promised 'er the finest set er sables that money can buy when 'e gits back."

"Let him *dare*, the beast," now broke in the other, excitedly, and there'll be a sizzler in this old Sodom! You just keep your ears peeled for a good big squeal from me if he does, Ol; and I'll put his wife wise at a two-forty pace, too. Maybe you think revenge ain't sweet to Violet Hutchinson? Well if it ain't sweet, it ain't exactly *wormwood* and *gall*, either."

"Ever seen the lady, Vi?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"She come into the studio for a bit of chat with her liege lord and master one day, months ago"; re-

plied the other; now laughing merrily at the recollection. "But trust Gerry to nip a nice, little, wifely habit like that in the bud; too inconvenient, you know. She never come again; oh, no, you bet she didn't!" chuckled the girl.

"What's she like?"

"Gee, Ol, but she's a *dream!* and *swell?* Well I should snicker! She's a born aristocrat, you could see that at a glance, but just as sweet and lovely as they make 'em; and the man who wouldn't be true to *her*, ought to be tarred and feathered; if *I do* say it! Why Ol, I felt like a three-cent piece beside her, and a counterfeit at that"; the girl went on; with a pitiful sigh of unmistakable, if perhaps, only momentary regret. Then continued, "She's a dear little *noodle* though, Gerry says; swallows down whole any kind of a spiel he's a mind to hand out, and thinks he's killing himself with overwork! Oh, law-see, ain't it rich!" she finished; shaking with laughter, in which her companion boisterously joined.

"Did it stump Gerry when she dropped in on yer?"

"Well, he's got the cheek of the devil, you know that, Ol; but he really did seem to turn just a shade paler around the gills for about the thirty-secondth part of a second."

"Introduce yer?"

"*Introduce me?* Don't try to be funny, Ol"; returned the other, impatiently.

"Anything a doin' at the time, Vi?" now asked her

companion, with still greater interest; prinking her ears for some possibly racy details to enjoy.

"O, nothing much, fortunately; I was sprawled out in a *negligé*, puffing—"

"And Gerry?" put in the other quickly.

"Well, he was—er—feasting his eyes upon my many charms, as usual"; drawled the girl, reflectively. "At a respectable distance, of course," she explained; "but with that lovesick, dying-calf sort of a look that the critter always puts into his innocent, soulful eyes, when he wants to be real melting." Adding, with a coarse laugh, "you've been there, Ol; you know how it is yourself."

The short, disgusting conversation, which from abundance of material might no doubt have been continued much longer, was here cut short by a sudden unusual stirring in the row behind, and a man's excited though smothered "Great Scott, Sis! she's fainted! Let's get her out of here quick!" And taking their unconscious young guest in his arms as though she had been a child, Jack Lindsay, flushed with indignation, and followed by his equally alarmed and angry sister, began making a hasty exit.

Turning at the sound of the unusual commotion behind them, the chattering women—whose incriminating conversation had been responsible for it—caught sight of the closed eyes, and the bloodless face hanging limply to one side.

"Good Lord, Ol!" exclaimed the reputed model of

the studio;—with a horrified and truly *remorseful* look upon her young, and still handsome, though hardened face—it's *her*, and she must have heard! The dose is just what *Gerry* deserves, but so help me God! I'd rather have had my tongue pulled out by the *roots*, than to hurt *her* so, if I'd only known!"

"It is too bad, poor thing"; allowed the older woman; with but little show of pity, however. Adding philosophically, "but there's no use cryin' over spilt milk, Vi. There'll be the devil to pay when *Gerry* gits home, that's a cinch! I hope she goes fer 'im, shovel an' tongs. You've cooked *your* goose with 'im though, all right, Vi, so you'd better git a wiggle on, an' begin a hustlin' for another job. Who's that crazy guy a rubberin' at, I wonder?" she finished; as her roving eye lighted upon some object ahead.

"Which one?" asked her companion, straightening up to look.

"Why that cracked lookin' old billiard ball down there in front"; sneered the other, as the curtain went up.

Stunned by the undreamed-of revelation—for she had never once suspected what manner of man he really was—Alice Harding had seen the base, loathsome character of her husband laid bare before her in the foregoing, low conversation, every word of which had been as a poisoned dart, piercing her already burdened heart with deadly aim; until her outraged feelings could bear no more and she had found a merciful

relief for a time in fainting. It was long before she came to, but when she did, it was to open her eyes upon the familiar surroundings of home, and to find the faithful friends, now so much needed, at her side; for an emergency calling for just the very advice, sympathy and assistance which Jack Lindsay had offered to her such a short two weeks before, had arisen all too soon.

Now, a heart deep wounded, feels too much pain to feel anger, 'tis said; and surely that of this young wife had been smitten to the core. There seemed nothing vindictive or vengeful in her feelings towards her husband, however. It might have been that she was too much crushed for that; for to her indignant friends, her calm resignation under such excessive provocation seemed hardly natural, even in one of her most sweet and forgiving disposition.

"I shall always blame myself for your suffering, Mrs. Harding";—Jack told her regretfully, when she had been revived and gained back a little of her wonted strength. "Only for this unfortunate evening which was *my* suggestion, you might never have learned these bitter truths; for that they *are* truths, I am unhappily unable to deny"; he was forced to admit, in answer to her questionings as to his knowledge of her husband's habits.

"They *are* *inexpressibly* bitter truths and sad, it is true, Mr. Lindsay," was the quiet reply; "and yet I feel that my enlightenment, which would no doubt

have come at some time, is most opportune just now, for before it, I had decided upon a course of action in a certain very important matter, which, unadvised, I might even yet have carried out; but it is possible that I may change my mind regarding it after hearing your opinions, for which I am now going to ask. You don't know what a relief and comfort it is to me to have friends in whom to confide and ask advice of; what would I do without them now? I have some means, you know," she went on, "and ever since we were married, my husband has been urging me to turn my affairs over to him to take care of for me. He thinks that is the way a wife should do, and so do I. It was the way Mamma did, and but that Auntie has continually advised delay, I should have consented long ago. *Perhaps* Gerald would have loved me more and been different, if I had"; she put in reproachfully; with a sudden new quiver in the voice that had not been there before. "I had made up my mind to do this upon his return, though," she continued after a pause, her tones gradually steadying as she spoke. "What do you both think about the plan? Please tell me."

"*Turn your fortune over to that—!* Pardon me, Mrs. Harding";—apologized her friend, for his vehemence was very pronounced, while with great effort he refrained himself from the scathing denunciation of the man which intense indignation had forced to his lips. "I'll try not to forget that I'm speaking of

your husband. But since you ask for our advice, and I am very sure my sister's opinion coincides with my own,"—an emphatic nod of approval from Miss Lindsay—"you must not *think* of such a thing. Why, it would be a practical signing of your death warrant to give your fortune into the keeping of a man like *him*."

"But I think perhaps my husband would appreciate it very much now, Mr. Lindsay," the woman replied, "and it *might* be the means of winning him back to better ways, you know."

"*Never*, Mrs. Harding!" protested Jack hotly; hurrying on, "the man who could be won back to better ways by such a means as *that*, couldn't be won back at all! If I may be pardoned an unintentional Hibernacism at such a time"; he put in quickly.

"A part of it at least, then"; persisted the other.

"Not a *penny*, Mrs. Harding!"

"But you don't know my husband, Mr. Lindsay"; Alice now ventured, and evidently voicing the confidence she was about to give with great reluctance. "Our life together would surely be most unhappy if I did not; and beside, there are reasons."

"I can conceive of no *good* reason for such a course, Mrs. Harding." There was now a tinge of real impatience in the tones of her friendly adviser. "While as for your life being *unhappy*," he went on, "God knows he's made it that already! *My* advice to you is to leave the man at once! he's proven himself utterly unworthy of you!"

"I could never do *that*, Mr. Lindsay"; at once put in the wronged wife, with a quiet dignity of manner always present, but which the unhappy experience of the evening seemed to have accentuated and made more noticeable; plainly showing the suggestion to be an altogether objectionable one. "I could never do *that*!" she repeated. "Separation, divorce, are things unknown in *my* family; considered a disgrace, even. 'Until death us do part,' has been the invariable practice upon both sides of the house; and I could never bring myself to be its first member to place a stigma upon it; a blot upon its unsullied escutcheon, by repudiating the marriage contract."

"Nor do *I* advocate such a proceeding, ordinarily, Mrs. Harding";—the man hastened to affirm—"but 'where the contract exists it involves obligation, to both husband and wife in an equal relation,' you know," he continued. "You must not lose sight of that fact; and *his* outrageous disregard of it, has given *you* the means of freedom."

"Which I do not want, Mr. Lindsay; I shall *never* leave my husband," came the quick reply, with a gentle positiveness which brooked of no further argument upon the subject. "And as for my fortune," she resumed, "he must have the half of it then, outright, since I may not entrust the whole of it to his keeping; and all things considered, I believe, with you, that such a course would not be wise now. *Please* do not think me unnecessarily obdurate, Mr. Lindsay,

or that I do not appreciate your advice"; she continued, with a sweet appealing; "but, you see, there are things which you do not know."

"And which you cannot tell me, Mrs. Harding?" queried the man; not for the satisfaction of an idle curiosity, but from a sincere desire to save their unwise young friend from herself, as appeared necessary.

An interval of silence now followed; Alice, the meanwhile, debating within herself as to whether the confiding of his unfortunate secret to these trustworthy friends, in whose keeping she well knew it would remain inviolate, would indeed be an act of criminal disloyalty to her deceased uncle. "Gerald, in his anger, will no doubt blurt it out, anyway," she reasoned, from her knowledge of her husband's disposition, "and it might be even better that they should hear it from me first."

"You will excuse my hesitation I hope, dear friends," she at length apologized. "It was not from any lack of confidence, I assure you, but because those reasons involved the good name of another. My husband's fortune has been lost through unprofitable investments. Uncle George, one of the dearest and noblest of men that ever lived, has had the care of it, you know, and a letter received from Aunt Alice since Gerald sailed, tells me that it is all gone. It will be a dreadful blow to him, of course, when he learns the shocking truth; so you see now that I couldn't *think* of keeping all of mine under such circumstances; and

I hope you will both approve of my dividing with him. It will not be quite an even division, either, for after giving to him the \$100,000 which has been lost, thanks to Uncle George's management, I shall have quite some more than that left; the 'lion's share,' you see"; she added, with a faint, sweet smile.

"Of course, it is not for *us* to disapprove, or object to such an unselfish arrangement, or even try to further dissuade you from it Mrs. Harding"; assented Jack, although reluctantly. "All we can do is to *hope* that it may be appreciated as you seem to think it will, and as it certainly should be."

"I believe it will, Mr. Lindsay," replied the woman, hopefully; "but in any case, I shall at least have the satisfaction and happiness of doing what I feel to be my duty." And there followed the mental query. "Was it not indeed for this very duty that I came unto this hour?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE MILLS OF GOD—TRANSFERRED AFFECTIONS.

“‘Because judgment against an evil work is not speedily pronounced, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.’”

Since the lofty virtues of appreciation and gratitude are not inherent in men of his type, it will be no surprise to the reader to learn that the generosity of his wife, splendid enough in any worthy case but almost without parallel in such an one as his, awakened neither of these emotions in the breast of Gerald Harding. That he accepted the gift goes without saying, for the slogan of his unmanly class has ever been, ‘get all you can from a wife.’ And if the whole truth must be told, even this voluntary division of her property in his interest, was far from satisfying; the absolute control of the whole being what he had always wished for, had long been urging, and had planned to *demand* from Alice now, as “but a proper offset for the thievish way in which *your* villainous uncle has buncoed me out of my own”; as he was not slow to wound afresh by telling her. For Gerald had reached home in an exceedingly ugly mood, and his wife’s show of real determination in opposing his wishes in the matter, was nothing calculated to soothe the ruffled feelings of the man.

At length, however, finding both persuasion and demand unavailing,—for Alice, to her credit be it said, had remained firm though sweet—he had ungraciously consented to accept the proposed settlement, and then, as might have been foreseen, at once set about having the time of his life.

What with the income from his profession—now quite large—and his wife's munificence, there was at this time considerable of money to burn, and like all prodigals, Gerald Harding lacked not for friends(?) to help throw this money to the flames. Conflagrations of the sort thus produced, could not of course burn within the pure and sacred precincts of home, and soon it came to be that but very little of the man's leisure time was spent there.

Details are not needed to convince us that it was now a sorry time for Alice Harding. There was the loneliness to be borne, and even more sickening still, there was the continual revolt of her intensely high-minded, truthful nature, against the oft-times puerile and well-known lying excuses of her husband for his absences and neglect. For he was in ignorance of her knowledge of his true character and mode of life, so cruelly thrust upon her on that fatal evening. She could not bring herself to tell him; she lacked the heart, because sensible of an utter lack of manhood in him to which she might appeal. "What good would it do?" she mused dejectedly. "He would but find some new way to deceive me." For the last lin-

gering ray of hope for a change of heart in her erring husband had vanished, when she saw how unthankfully her gift had been received; and she was forced to the sorry conclusion that she must resign herself to the unhappy fate of an unloved wife.

It was during these early, bitter days of dispelled illusion, that Alice Harding learned the exceeding sweetness of true friendship. 'Faithful friends are hard to find,' writes one; but the value of such as now revealed to her in Hattie and Jack Lindsay, she found to be beyond computing. Knowing her great need of loving sympathy and companionship, these two, impelled alike by devotion to a cherished memory and admiration for herself, became a stay and support which not even the unpardonable boorishness of her husband—between whom and they, as we have learned, there was no love lost—could drive from her.

This boorishness he had first manifested upon the occasion of their call to inquire after the health of his wife, on the day following his arrival home. Out of sorts with the world in general at this time, and Alice in particular, and agig with delight at having an opportunity to rap the man whom he was pleased to look upon as an enemy, Gerald had acknowledged his wife's introduction to Mr. Lindsay with a very formal handshake, accompanied by a cold, "I've had the pleasure of meeting the gentleman before"; then coarsely added, "did you know that he was stuck on your mother once? But Aunt Alice was too smart for him and knocked his little game silly."

The despicable taunt had been as a dagger-thrust to Jack Lindsay, and the impulse to collar the man then and there a hard one to resist; but consideration for the mortified wife had of course made this necessary, and he had deigned no reply. Alice had apologized for it afterward on the plea that her husband was very tired and not feeling well; but the occurrence had effectually shattered the pleasant dream she began indulging at the first meeting with her new found friends, that they four might form a companionable quartette; and the realization that this hope, also, must prove futile, added yet another to her already long list of disappointments.

With much the same ardor with which a disappointed soul oft flings itself into religion, the unhappy woman now flung herself into the prospect of approaching maternity; months distant it was true, yet engrossing and alluring, since the knowledge of its certainty gave rise to a new hope within her. "Surely *fatherhood* will bring my husband to himself, prove his salvation, and yet bring happiness to my life"; was the sustaining belief upon which she now allowed herself to feed. But 'a silk purse was never yet made out of a sow's ear,' and the coming of a little daughter, which had been such a longed for joy to the young mother even though she must risk her life to bear it, awakened no parental love in the man; who turned away as might an Oriental, when told as to its sex, grumbling because he could not have had a son. While

it's *going*, which had helped the bereaved mother—practically alone in her grief—‘to understand many things,’ seemed also to make but slight, if any impression upon him.

Little Gertrude—as she would have been called—came into the world such a frail bit of humanity, that the tiny spark of life animating her feeble frame was soon snuffed out. That the little one who had come into their life as babies always do into the lives of their parents, ‘to teach them the way to love, tell them the way to live, and show them the way to die,’ had been placed on High as a magnet to draw them to Heaven, the sorrowing mother was not slow to believe; for ‘even in the darkest night of death, hope sees a star, and listening love can hear the rustle of a wing.’ And sweetly obedient to the heavenly vision, she strove to pass submissively under the afflicting rod, and thenceforth to set her affections more fully upon things above. And He who had both given and taken away, had also tempered the wind, in the blessed companionship of her parents’ one time friends; without whom, her life in this trying epoch would indeed have been a ‘blank, arid Sahara.’ For to his habitual coldness of demeanor, Gerald had now added the habit of frequently absenting himself from home for days at a time, without deigning either explanation or excuse for his absences.

“If it had only been a boy,” was a delusion the disappointed woman then chose to hug to her bosom, re-

garding her offspring, "Gerald would have been satisfied, and all would have been different and as I hoped." But when, less than two years later, a son and heir had been born to the couple, *its* coming also failed of the desired result, for the man was a natural pervert, lacking utterly in even the instincts of father-hood; hence, there was no reformation.

For Alice, however, the coming of her child at once furnished an object upon which to lavish the pent up store of affection in her intensely loving nature. 'Home cures are surest for home cares'; and in the welcome delights and responsibilities of mother-hood, was found in large measure a panacea for her heart's ills. And when the little one had been with them a few months, hope for a betterment in her domestic affairs sprang up and again ran high; for Gerald,—like many another derelict—having been brought very near to the gates of death by indulgence in the pace that kills, seemed to have been brought also to himself by the visitation; and during a long period of convalescence which followed, one of his old time waves of contrition had swept over the man, filling him with the deepest, most bitter regret for his wicked ways, and the sorrow and unhappiness which these had entailed upon his devoted and forgiving young wife. For the first time, too, he now began to note the irresistibly cunning ways of his offspring, and to look with fatherly pride upon the budding intelligence of the beautiful boy, now arriving at an interesting

and enjoyable age. As he talked over the little one's future with its equally proud mother, laying plans both affectionately and wisely for the welfare and upbringing of their son, no one, least of all the entranced wife, could have doubted the genuineness of his conversion and sincerity of his expressed good intentions.

"We will leave Paris, dearie, for the sake of our precious child," he proposed to her earnestly, "and never with *my* permission shall he set foot upon its sin-cursed pavements, from whence the blood of countless pure-minded, clean-lived youths cry to Heaven for vengeance; would to God *I* had never known its damnable fascinations!"—he was a glib, impressive talker, was Gerald. "We will go back home, sweetheart, and settle down to the pure, healthful and inspiring delights of life in some quiet, peaceful spot, away from the distractions and temptations of a city; and there, unknown, among strangers, beginning life afresh, will learn to love each other anew and better, while by precept and example we train our darling boy up in the way he should go."

Over-joyed at the change which illness had wrought in her husband, confident beyond doubting, of happiness in store thenceforth, delighted at the thought of his removal from associates and associations to whose influence alone she attributed his downfall, and impatient to leave the city which had so effectually shattered her high hopes, Alice Harding lost no time in arranging for their return to America; and as soon

as the penitent convalescent had gained enough of strength to undertake the most easy and comfortable of traveling with comparative safety, the united, happy little family set sail for home.

In one of the most charming spots to be found in that artist's paradise of the Empire State, the picturesque country of Ulster, none too far from the great City for easy visits to its many and varied attractions as fancy should occasionally lead them, a gem of a home and small estate—the purchase of the wife—were secured; in which, with seemingly far brighter prospects for happiness than had before shone over them, among strangers, as the husband had wished, Alice and Gerald Harding entered upon what surely gave rich promise of proving a second, and much more lasting honeymoon.

But ours has grown to be such a *small* world, that to run away from one's name, good or bad, lose one's identity, has become a practical impossibility; and even under suburban life in strange parts, the couple could not long remain unknown. Although no whisper of the gossip reached their ears, the story of wrong doing which had previously so marred their married life, soon leaked out; their nearest neighbor being a lady who, during several years of Gerald's career in Paris, had been a student in its Latin Quarter. And while the two had never met, had yet heard much of his disgraceful escapades, and shameful treatment and neglect of his beautiful, young wife; the subject being

common gossip among the fraternity. Not being slow to disseminate her knowledge, the pale, wasted, but now repentant husband became vested with a sort of romantic interest for many, at least of the feminine portion of the community; while sweet Alice was voted 'a darling; an angel'; and the devoted pair became, in a way, both notorious and popular at once.

With enough of congenial company among a few easily accessible neighbors of the same class of comparative leisure as themselves, and who, like themselves, had chosen to eschew the bustle and glamour of city life for the more restful, uplifting contemplation of green hills and sylvan dells, the glorious panorama of wooded mountains, deep, wild ravines and gorgeous sunsets, and the silvery music of babbling brooks and tinkling cow-bells, even though months were required to bring back, as before, the spent strength of the convalescent, yet their ideal life together during that first Spring and Summer in their native land, was one of unbroken and incomparable delight. Could it but have lasted!

But alas! a full return of health and vigor, brought with it also a fever for the old manner of existence; and Gerald's thoughts and longings began turning city-ward, once more. The simplicity and quietude of the country began to pall; he became restless, fidgety, irritable; took to making frequent trips to the Metropolis alone; and at length suggested—quite forcibly, as was his wont—that they remove thither

for the Winter. Accordingly, in the early Autumn, loath as Alice felt to leave the spot made inexpressibly dear to her because of the happy experiences of her married life—the first worth calling such—which had come to her there, the change was made. A pretty apartment was taken in which to live, and an adjoining suite also engaged and fitted up as a studio, in which for a time, the husband—as promised—carried on the duties of his profession; and despite the knowledge and unfavorable opinion of large cities in general, which her Parisian experience had thrust upon her, Alice Harding bravely persisted in hoping the best as to her husband's conduct, and refused to entertain the uneasy fears which would at times arise like spectres to disturb and alarm her. "New York is not Paris," she would remind herself, encouragingly, "and surely such gross wickedness cannot prevail here. Beside, he has a son to love and live for now, and he is at home with us always."

New York, however, is no more a stainless Eden than is Paris or any other large city; and the particular sin to which one may have become addicted, can find one out as easily and surely there, and furnish probably equal opportunities for its indulgence.

And Gerald did not long remain 'at home always' either. It was not many weeks before he found 'the frequent temptation to leave my work and run to the nursery for a frolic with the kid, too distracting';—so he told his wife, as prolific in plausible excuses

as ever, we see. 'And then the location was not proving convenient enough; he must get a studio further down town.'

Which he did, of course, and was soon in the very same toils as on the other side; and from his unreasoning excesses, seemingly trying to make up for lost time. The 'new leaf' turned over but those few months before had flown back; all the professions of repentance, the good resolutions, the extravagant promises of better doing, all were forgotten. Poor Gerald! Surely he was of his Father, the Devil; for—

'When the Devil got sick, the Devil a saint would be;
When the Devil got well, the devil a saint was he.'

Poor Gerald? Yes, and poorer Alice; in whose long-suffering heart, hope had been raised but to be crushed to earth, and, unlike *Truth*, never to rise again. For after this backsliding, the man's heart became hardened, like unto Pharaoh's. He seemed as if inspired with an ambition to *shine* as a profligate, and while he began curtailing his income by neglecting his profession, his means, much of which had been squandered before his illness, flew like the wind. Upon the rare occasions of his visits home,—which were seldom made for any other purpose than the making of insolent demands upon his wife for money—he was frequently abusive, and even cruel.

Thus did a six months of renewed city life drag wearily by; and with the return of Spring, Alice,

anxious yet to save her recreant husband if possible, pleaded with him earnestly and tearfully, to return with her and the child to their country seat, and resume the sweet life of the year before. But all such entreaties were unavailing. "I will never bury myself in that infernally stupid hole again"; declared the man, vehemently. "I may run up for a Sunday now and then, but that's all you need expect. The city's no place for you and the kid though, during the Summer;—I shall probably not be here much of the time myself—and the sooner you and he light out, the better I'll be pleased"; he concluded impudently.

And discouraged, hopeless, wearied also with the struggle, reluctant though she was to leave her wilfully weak spouse so entirely to his own devices, yet obliged to take her child to the fresh, pure air for which he now pined, this sweet, young wife and mother was now compelled to return to her former happy home alone.

It is under the stress of such and similar provocation, that many a well-intentioned one, disheartened, lonely, desperate, has sought relief by yielding to the temptation to slip her moorings, and begin to drift; for, given a woman young or of engaging personality, opportunities are nowhere lacking for the pursuance of such a course. While others, availing themselves of the law's intervention, legitimately cast aside the irksome bonds. But *this* wife was incapable of the one course, disinclined to the other.

Could a royal welcome have sufficed to bring glad-

ness to a heart, however, then should that of Alice Harding been full to overflowing; for during the previous sojourn of the little family in the community, their inviting home had been a favorite gathering place, and its charming mistress had endeared herself to all; and as she came among them once more without her husband, and as was well known, despondent, heart sick,—for rumors of the life he was again leading her had floated in to them from time to time,—their sympathy, necessarily unexpressed in words, though it was, was none the less deep and lively; finding vent in constant delicate attentions and mutual plannings for her entertainment, which should make the unwholesome seclusion in which she would fain have buried herself, impossible.

And the Lindsays, too, had come over as promised, that Summer, to see Jack's little namesake, and to rejoice with their young friends in their continued happiness. For Alice had written the most glowing accounts for a while after their return, as to the permanence of the change of heart which they had known to have taken place in her husband before leaving Paris; which, after his fall from grace, she had never contradicted. It was a sad enough enlightenment for them when they arrived, to learn the true state of affairs. Yet their visit seemed to have been as providentially timed as was that first meeting with their needy friend, for during their stay, the poor young mother was again called to pass through deep waters;

the one joy and comfort of life, in whom her riven heart was naturally altogether centered, her baby boy, now in his critical second Summer, being suddenly taken from her during an unbearable spell of exceeding sultry August weather. And in her awful sorrow this second time, the bereaved mother was *literally* weeping alone, for the husband and father,—who had favored them with his company but once during the entire season,—was now off with a mixed party of gay companions, autoing through Europe.

“I wish to the Lord he’d fall over some precipice and break his good-for-nothing neck”! was Hattie Lindsay’s angry comment to her brother—she was given to somewhat forcible expressions when filled with righteous indignation on any subject,—when the man’s whereabouts was at length learned, that the news of his bereavement might be made known to him.

“If wishing would bring it to pass, Sis, I’d add a hearty ‘Amen’! to that,” replied her brother. “It would be useless though, I suppose, for you know a kind Providence is said to watch over children and drunken men; and from what I hear, the reprobate’s very often in that condition, now-a-days. I can’t understand, though, for the life of me, why such a worthless cuss as he, is allowed to go on living. It gets *me*”!

“Nor I, either”; echoed his sister, disgustedly. “Now if he was out of the way and Alice free, we

could probably do something with and for her"—they had both been urging a separation ever since coming over—"but as long as he lives—and that worthless kind *never* die,—there'll be no talking sense or reason to her, I'm afraid. It's all 'my duty to my husband'! she scoffed, "but no thought about giving her innocent children such a father. I'm beginning to lose all patience with her, Jack! Then, too, it's such a gross outrage that her young life should be so wasted. I believe in wifely duty up to a reasonable point as much as any living soul does; but you'd never catch *me* holding on and trying to save such a miserable apology for a man as *he* is, if I was married—which, thank Heaven, I'm not!—and I'm old enough to be her mother, too."

Could the Lindsays have taken their young friend home with them that Fall, they would have returned much happier and far better pleased with her than was the case. But Paris now held scant charm for Alice Harding, its memories being little more than a hideous nightmare; and their pressing invitation, therefore, would have held but slight temptation, even had not both inclination and an abnormal sense of duty, impelled her to remain near to a little flower-covered mound in the quiet country churchyard; whose softening influence,—as they should mingle their tears over it upon his home-coming,—would at last, she believed, prove her husband's saviour. She was therefore deaf to all persuading; so in the company of a

congenial, devoted companion of maturer years, faithful servants, and surrounded by many loving friends, they left her, though unwillingly, to her chosen vigil.

Had the woman sat idly down and brooded over her crushing loss and the otherwise hardness of her lot, as many like circumstanced would have done, both mind and body would perhaps have given way under the strain. But those very trials had fortunately developed in her a strength and fortitude of character, altogether unlooked for in one containing such extraordinary sweetness; so that after the first *intense bitterness* of her grief had given way to a more settled calm, realizing that her mind must have some definite and absorbing occupation,—and building far wiser than she knew at the time,—Alice had joined with her companion in a course of somewhat rudimentary instruction in the science of medicine and nursing, under the tutelage of their neighborhood physician; an able, fatherly man, who, moved by deepest pity for her trying situation, was more than willing to give to the undertaking the required amount of his valuable time.

Thus, with mind and time much occupied, the wearisomeness of waiting and its wearing suspense, were both lessened; while through the potent medium of music,—for which she had been born with a passion, and of which she was a very creditable master,—Alice Harding found the needed vent for those recurring waves of melancholy, which, when emotion became *too* impetuous, could not always be repressed.

Under these very unusual conditions of existence, nearly eighteen more wearying months had passed; their unvarying monotony broken only by an *occasional* letter from abroad, in which the wayward wanderer would always speak of an intended quick return. But Winter and Spring and Summer and Autumn and again, Winter, had come and gone, and by the gentle power of yet another Spring, the ice-bound streams had been freed, the hills were again resplendent with verdure, the air vibrant with melody and laden with perfume; and still he lingered and caroused. For because judgment against an evil work is not speedily pronounced, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil; the Psalmist avers.

But,

‘Though the mills of God grind slowly,

Yet they grind exceeding small.

Though with patience He stands waiting,

With exactness grinds He all.’

Neither in life nor death did Gerald Harding ever reach home again; for early that Summer (1905) he was overtaken by the very fate invoked upon him by his wife’s indignant friend. Reckless and incapable from intoxication, while guiding his car along a mountain road at break-neck speed, he had collided with another, with such force as to hurl him over the precipice which, in a spirit of dare-deviltry, he hugged; and whose descent was so difficult and dan-

gerous, that the mangled body was not even recovered. The degenerate son of a degenerate sire, he had not lived out half his days, and save for the tears of pity?—surely it had not been regret that called them forth,—shed by his patient, faithful wife, the prodigal had died unwept.

“Thank the Lord”! exclaimed Hattie Lindsay, when the news of the man’s untimely ending reached them. And although there was but little of reverence apparent in the manner of expression, it was as eloquent of honesty as was her deep drawn sigh of satisfaction and relief, as she announced, “I shall go to Alice at once, Jack; not to condole with her, you may be sure of that, but to rejoice; although I shall unfortunately be deprived of the pleasure of doing that openly. But I’ll bring her back with me, rest assured of that, for I feel that she belongs to us now. I’ll give her no peace this time until she consents to come.” A vow, which in her heart of hearts, the discerning and unselfish sister more than half believed would be a particularly agreeable one to her attentive listener.

“I hope you may succeed, Sis,” returned the man, heartily; “and if you do, we’ll show her that Paris isn’t altogether bad. That as great and true happiness may be found here as anywhere, if it’s looked for in the right ways and places.”

Hurrying a few things into a gladstone and case, the faithful friend had set off for Liverpool; and fortunate in catching a swift-going steamer there without

delay, was soon at her loved one's side. Whom, too, she found it not so hard to persuade, as she had feared, this time; since the compelling invitation was accepted gratefully, yes gladly; for in truth, the desolate heart of the now lone young woman, had long been yearning for the companionship of these dearest, these almost parental friends; so, jubilant at the unexpected success of her double errand, Hattie Lindsay had insisted upon an immediate return with her most welcome guest, to Paris, and Jack.

Now it had happened that from their very earliest acquaintance, the youthful Alice had felt drawn to these maturer friends much as to parents; and while she had not always been able to see her way clear to the following of their advice, she had nevertheless, in each case, been comforted with the belief that she was understood. And as she now came to them to be their guest a second time, it was much with the blissful feeling of a child returning to a loved and loving father and mother, from whom it had long been separated.

In their peaceful, happy home, where appreciation, delicately expressed sympathy, and the kindest consideration met her on every hand, where the ruling spirit, the motive for every action, seemed plainly and touchingly marked by a desire to erase from her heart and mind, as quickly, and as far as might be possible, the crushing, blighting memories of the past, Alice, contented, gave herself up thankfully to its soothing,

curative influences, and like a tired child, worn and wearied both in mind and body from its too strenuous and long continued play, at last, rested.

But we must not digress nor loiter for minor details; for this story being the record of none but love affairs, the tender passion is therefore the only skeleton upon which we may be permitted to build. And as we, perforce, return to it once more, we can but hope that the reader has not become weary of the sweet subject. No, nor ever will be; for 'tis love, alone, can make Earth beautiful, and life without regret.'

Since Alice Harding, physically, was almost an exact counterpart of her beautiful mother—as Jack Lindsay, it will be recalled, had been impelled to remark at their first meeting,—and as intimate and continued association but revealed the more clearly in her those same admirable traits of character which had not only inspired his youthful love, but, though vain and hopeless, had kept it alive and undimmed even to middle life, which he had by now reached, it was neither unnatural nor strange that the feeling of fatherly interest, which, as Gertie's daughter, he had at first felt in her, should give place to a deeper, a more personal emotion. And this change *did* gradually take place, as month after month rolled by, and the object of his ripening love remained a cherished member of their little family. And patiently waiting until a proper regard for the proprieties should have made a declaration of this love fitting,—for that the new-made

widow would spend at least her entire year of deepest mourning with them, was the confident expectation of her hosts,—the hopeful lover delighted in picturing to himself, the closing years of life filled with all those longed-for joys and blessings which an adverse fate had denied its earlier ones.

But of a sudden, came a disquieting day of unwelcome intelligence; when, after having received a home letter from her companion, their guest announced to them the necessity for a speedy termination of her delightful visit.

“Miss Griswold writes me that she has gotten back from her vacation and has everything in readiness for my reception,”—running her eye over the letter as she talked. “Oh, no; I really can’t disappoint her”; she continued, in response to the immediate urgings of her friends that she remain, “for this Winter will furnish her a last opportunity to complete our course of study, and this is an important matter to her, you know, because it is costing her nothing, and she contemplates turning her knowledge to profit later on. So you see, I can but go to her, although you must surely know that I shall leave you with much reluctance.”

Now, as may be imagined, the prospect of so suddenly losing their cherished guest, was by no means a pleasant one to either of her friends, and especially to her host, at this particularly critical time; whose mind at the unexpected announcement, at once flew, with dread, to the thought of the unfillable vacancy her

going would leave in the home, for him, at least. Never until then had he fully realized how very dear the woman had become to him, how deeply he loved her, how much he longed to feel her sweet presence always near, what a perfect joy and comfort, aye blessing, her life-long companionship would be to him. "No, I *cannot* let her go," he admonished himself, with unhesitating decision, "for in her lies my last and only chance for a completed life and happiness. I must tell her of my love even if the time be not fully ripe. That delays are dangerous was surely taught me to my cost and sorrow, in the case of her dear mother; and I must not allow myself to lose *her* treasure and *mine* by a similar mistake."

It was at their luncheon that Alice Harding had first spoken of going home; and after a lengthy and animated conversation upon the subject, in which both brother and sister exhausted their stores of plea and argument, Jack concluded the long homily with a resigned—"Well, Mrs. Harding, since we can neither coax, persuade, nor intimidate, but simply give you up, it seems, to Miss Griswold, for whom you are determined to leave us so soon, I hope you can spare a little time this afternoon for a last run down to the studio. I've a subject that I'd like your opinion on; there's a sort of vexed question connected with it, that you can help me settle better than any one else. Will you go"?

"Thanks; indeed I will, Mr. Lindsay"! replied

their guest; smiling with unmistakable pleasure at the prospect. Then continuing—"and be most happy to, I assure you; although I fear my humble opinion will be of little value. But your invitation's both too flattering and kind to refuse. You know, too, what a treat a visit to the studio always is to me. At what time shall I be ready"? she finished.

"I leave that to your convenience"; returned her host. "Only," he added,—anxious to free his mind of the 'vexed question,'—I would suggest starting before it gets *too* late, for the afternoons are rather short now, you know; the light fades pretty early."

But although the afternoon was far from spent when they arrived, the light of day had faded, and in the deep, blue, wintry sky, a vast galaxy of brilliant stars was already beginning to glisten and twinkle, ere they emerged from the studio and made their way homewards. For they had talked long and earnestly together, these two, after that Alice had been shown the nearly finished portrait of Miss Lindsay, being done by the artist-friend for *her*, as a Christmas surprise.

"It's a *perfect* likeness, and *splendidly* done, Mr. Lindsay"! she exclaimed with delight; "and how can I ever thank you enough for it? You'll hang it for me, in just the right light, won't you, when you bring it over? You know I shall expect you both to spend the Holidays with me. Oh, how I shall prize it! for Miss Lindsay has been a second mother to me, and to

have so lifelike a reminder of her always in sight, will make her seem so much less far away. I'm going to miss you both more than I can say, dear friend," she continued, with much feeling, "and shall never be able to fully express my appreciation of this, and all your many other kindnesses to me, I fear. You have placed me under such overwhelming obligations as I can never hope to discharge, so matter how long I might live."

"If you are going to speak of obligation, Mrs. Harding," put in her companion, quickly, "then the balance must ever incline to our side; for you have endeared yourself so to us, that our wish for you to remain, our unwillingness to have you leave us, proceeds from pure, downright selfishness. You have once again brought the hope of perfect happiness to *my* life, Alice"; he now boldly affirmed—calling the woman by her given name for the first time; and there was a melting tenderness in his voice as he breathed it. And as he turned and took her hands impulsively in his own—they had been standing very near each other before the unfinished portrait,—he went on, apologetically: "I hope you will overlook what may seem a premature declaration of my feelings towards you; I could have waited longer if you would have stayed with us; but since you will not, I *cannot* let you go without knowing my fate. I *love* you, Alice, and I want your promise to become my wife."

But there being no immediate reply,—for this second

and greatest surprise had followed so quickly upon the other as to deprive the woman of words, even of thoughts,—this mature lover talked on, and on, and on; pleading his cause with much more than the vaunted ardor and eloquence of youth; for in his pleading, was voiced the *first* outpouring of the pent-up longings of a whole *lifetime* of a *deeply affectionate nature* for the delights of love.

“I had never expected to transfer my affections, Alice”; he told her at last, in concluding. “To offer to any other woman, the love which would have been given to your dear mother. But you are so like her, in you she so lives again, that you seem almost her representative; as though one sent to me in her stead. And in offering it to you, I feel it to be more a tangible continuance than a transference. Oh, will you not accept it, and give me yours in return”? he pleaded.

Now the man’s long and fervid suing had been listened to without interruption. No real displeasure had been shown at his declaration, but the unmistakable evidences of surprise that he had seen evoked by his first impassioned words, had not changed to those of *pleased* surprise as he proceeded, as he could have wished. Rather had they seemed to give way to an air of polite attention; of patient waiting until he might finish. In a word, there had been nothing whatever of encouragement or help in the woman’s attitude and manner; and as he ceased speaking, she shook her head sadly as she replied: “I could have wished to

spare *you*, of *all* men, a disappointment, Mr. Lindsay. I feel it to be indeed a great compliment you pay in thus addressing me, but I cannot accept what I cannot return, and I have no heart to give. I made *one loveless* marriage," she explained,—“for which, however, believe me, there were good and justifiable reasons—and I want never to make another.”

“Yet, in spite of everything,—pardon the allusion, Alice,” he put in, delicately—“there were times when you had almost *learned* to love, had you not? You have told us as much; and surely you could do the same in *my* case”!

“In your case, there would be everything to make the task an easy one”; was the ingenuous and flattering reply;—and given, moreover, with much of emphasis;—“of that I should have not a doubt. But *learning* to love is not *loving*, Mr. Lindsay. It is a perfunctory task that one sets one’s self, and like all *tasks*, liable to become more or less burdensome at times, I fear, under *any* conditions. Besides, I doubt if it can ever bring the most perfect happiness to either party, as too many considerations must necessarily enter into it; for it is of course, a gradual process, more or less calculating, and even if successful, the sentiment must be tempered largely by admiration, gratitude, the joy of realized hope, or a sense of duty. But *loving*, *that* is an involuntary, instantaneous going out of the heart. Is *adoration*; and therefore, *bliss*. *Learning* to love may be the saner and safer course to

pursue, perhaps, but *loving, fills* the heart to *repletion!* and I speak from experience, Mr. Lindsay," she concluded, hurriedly, almost breathless; as though completely carried away with her subject.

"What! Is there then *another*, Alice"? exclaimed her listener in quick surprise; a note of unspeakable disappointment apparent in his tone. "I had no thought of *that* possibility."

"There was"; faintly whispered his companion, while instantly lowering the beautiful eyes, to which tears of sad remembrance were fast hurrying.

"And is"? he ventured.

"Not now."

"Nor ever will be"? again queried the lover eagerly, as though with returning hope.

"No, *never*"; replied the unhappy woman; an air of misery, and utter and abject hopelessness, now pervading both tone and manner. But soon raising her now tear-filled eyes—in which was a look of mute appeal—to his, she remained silent for yet a moment, struggling to regain her composure; then faltered, wearily, "but Oh, *please* let us say no more upon the subject, Mr. Lindsay."

"Pardon me, Alice, for awakening any painful memories"; begged the man, regretfully; placing an arm in tender sympathy about his companion as he spoke. "I did not know. But since there can never be this other one," he pursued, "why will you not give yourself to *me*, dearest? Even if you *never* succeeded in learning

to love me, I should be satisfied; for *my* love, will be deep enough and broad enough and strong enough for us both. Our kinship in the *disappointments* of love will surely have fitted us to understand each other, and *that* in itself will be worth *much*."

But for answer, Alice Harding once more, slowly shook her head.

"Is this other and hopeless attachment your only reason for refusing me"? went on the persistent lover. "O, if it is, darling, I beg of you not to let an idea, a memory, perhaps, keep us apart! Think for a moment of all you will be depriving *me* of; while *you*, so young and alone in the world, should not deny yourself love, companionship, protection; and what more fitting than that *I*, to whom you are *doubly* dear, should offer you these"?

"It is a memory only, that stands between us, Mr. Lindsay"; now confessed the other, after a moment's backward silence, "for my admiration for you is unbounded. But that memory is so *very* precious an one, that it will *forever* keep me from marriage with another; the mere *thought* of entering into such a relationship would be obnoxious to me. O, my dear, good friend," she then went on, with a wistful pleading, her voice again tremulous with emotion, "surely one whose life has been such a touching and noble example of *undying* love, as has yours, *must* be able to understand the emotions of *my* heart! *You* have found the satisfaction and joy of living, in constancy

to a cherished memory; and would you keep from *me*, a like, coveted experience"? she finished; in manner to upbraid.

An ensuing break in the conversation after this confession and appeal, was both prolonged and painful; the perturbed lover, the while, pacing nervously back and forth, from one end of the long and now dimly lighted studio to the other, with head inclining dejectedly towards his breast, his hands tightly clutched behind him. It was a pause of thoughtful, and of undoubted, intense struggle within himself; a pause in which was enacted a heart tragedy. Yet the manly words which fell from his lips, as he halted, at last, before the patiently waiting woman, showed the perfect unselfishness of his love; the trueness and worth of it.

"Alice," he murmured softly, though steadily, again taking the dear one's hands, and looking down with an infinitude of tenderness into her anxiously upturned face, "you make it *very* hard for me when you put it to me like that; for longing has been *inexpressibly intense*, and hope—may I say it?—*very strong*. But you also strike a chord in my heart, tuned to the same minor strains as those in your own. I *do* understand, dear, and therefore I cannot ignore your plea. Your happiness is far dearer to me than my own, and if it would in any degree be lessened by becoming my wife, I could not ask it of you; so I will urge you no further. I will not even say that I shall continue to

hope, and thus, as it were, attach a string to my renunciation, for that might annoy and fret you. But Alice, my love for you will never die. With time, your aversion to matrimony may, and if it ever does, dear, you will find some way, I trust, of letting me know; for I shall be waiting for you."

"Your comprehension is truly most comforting, dear friend, and your consideration equally touching"; answered the relieved woman, gratefully smiling up at her companion, "and in face of it, I shall appear cold and heartless indeed, I fear, when I bid you relinquish *all* hope, even for a change in my sentiments toward matrimony. But I feel that I may and *should* say to you candidly, at this time, that there is *absolutely* no ground upon which for you to build such a hope, since my objection is not to marriage in itself, but to another loveless one; and I have no heart for any one but him for whom it was made, and whose alone, it has always been; not even for *you*. But oh, I *do* hope that my refusal will not cost me your invaluable friendship, Mr. Lindsay. I may still count upon that, may I not"? she pleaded. "I need it so much. In your home I have found such a blessed haven of rest; in you and Miss Lindsay, just such a source of sympathy and encouragement amid the sorrows and trials of life, as I should have had in my dear parents. Not because of the difference in our ages," she interjected quickly, as in apology, "for believe me, Mr. Lindsay, that has nothing whatever to do with my

unwillingness to become your wife, but because of the deep and tender interest that you have both shown in my welfare and happiness; and I could not *bear* to lose you as my very dearest and best of friends."

"Nor will you, Mrs. Harding"; returned the man, with hearty re-assurance. "Have no fears upon that score, for our pride and pleasure in being able to claim friendship with so noble a woman as yourself, nothing, least of all the discovery of yet another lovable trait, can lessen. Forget that I have aspired to a nearer and dearer relationship than that of friend, or remember it only to the more perfectly understand the very high esteem in which I hold you; and make me happy now, by assuring me that you will come to me as freely for advice, sympathy, or protection even, should you ever be in need of either, as you would have done before I had spoken to you of love. For unless I can believe that you will do that, I shall never be able to forgive myself for having disturbed our sweet association of the past."

"Can you doubt that I will be rejoiced to do so, Mr. Lindsay"? came the instantaneous response. "I shall indeed hope, by that very means, to in some slight degree show my gratitude for the unselfishness which has made such a course possible; and for which I thank you most sincerely," added the grateful woman. "It means more to me than you could have foreseen, too, for had it been otherwise, I could not have carried out a project that I have had in mind of late, and to

the consummation of which I have been looking forward with the happiest anticipation. I want to dispose of my interests in America and come to Paris to live, where I may be always with Miss Lindsay and you. That is," she finished inquiringly, "if it would not be objectionable or unpleasant for *you* to have me do so, now"?

On the contrary, it will be decidedly the reverse of both, Mrs. Harding," replied her friend, his pleased surprise very apparent, "and you could not have told me more agreeable news. Sister and I both feel that you belong to us, as it were, and I sincerely hope that the happiness your coming will bring us may not be long delayed."

"And so do I," returned Alice, frankly, "for I have become most anxious for the change. I shall go back to Miss Griswold and our studies for the Winter, as I promised; and then by Spring, I trust her affairs will have so shaped themselves that I shall not longer feel it obligatory upon me, in a way, to provide her a home, but instead, may feel free to indulge my own inclinations; in which case, I shall soon be with you again."

"The sooner the better, dear friend," responded the rejected lover, heartily, with a well feigned show as of cheerful resignation at the prospective parting. "And now, shall we make for home, to share the good news for the future with Sis?" he finished.

CHAPTER X.

ROBERT MANNING'S TRANSGRESSIONS.

"Strength of will in proportion to physical strength seemed strangely so lacking in him at this time, that **Ichabod** might most fittingly have been inscribed over the gateway to his young manhood."

It is a somewhat far cry, from Paris, France, to San Francisco, California, U. S. A.; yet thither the trend of our story now compels us to journey, for we must learn how it has fared with our young friend, Robert Manning; who, embittered and cynical, it will be remembered, had sought for possible relief from the pangs of disappointed love, by a change of residence to the last named, pleasure-loving city.

Nigh on to six years had now elapsed, since that glorious morn amid the mountains of Colorado, when, as a youthful but deeply anxious suitor, he had formally made an impassioned declaration of his life-long love to Alice Nichols, and been relieved and cheered by the girl's acknowledgment of a perfect return, and the promise of her heart and hand in marriage, when added years and the completion of his preparation for a man's work in the world, should have won for him his coveted reward; the privilege of claiming her as his own.

If the reader will hark back in memory to the stirring scenes of that momentous morning, he will recall how earnestly, and impressively, the tortured youth had pleaded for fidelity upon the part of the girl. That she would wait for him, and never allow her heart to be drawn away by the blandishments of his dreaded rival, Gerald Harding.

‘I can stand his loving *you*, Alice, as long as you don’t return it; but I couldn’t stand if you did, *really* I couldn’t, for my heart’s been bound up in you too long and too completely for that. I believe it would *kill* me,’ were a part of his thrilling words, ‘but if it didn’t quite do that, it would change me so that I would better be dead; I can *feel* that it would, Alice; that I should never be the same again.’ And the besmirched record of the passing years, had alas! borne only too convincing testimony, to the unerring prescience of the youth as to the composition and workings of his own nature.

Now—

Hope entertained, excites the heart,
To pleasurable emotion;

and since it had been with the most confident hope for good results in the case of her discarded son, that Margaret Manning had consented to leave all those cherished surroundings, so inexpressibly dear to a heart such as hers, and take up her abode in new and strange parts, that the peace of mind and welfare of

the idolized one might thereby be enhanced,—to a mother such as she the most vital concern in life,—it had therefore been with even ‘pleasurable emotion,’ that she had hastened, at his request, to turn her back upon the old home, haunted as it was, for him, by the ghosts of so many heart-rending memories, and set up a new one in the unmemoried city of his choice; where, upon the clean, spotless pages of a new book of life, all future happenings might, with a reasonable degree of certainty, be expected to emblazon themselves in shining characters of light. And to this end, the most untiring and constant effort had been put forth to make of that home first, a peaceful, blessed haven of rest, and second, a centre of joy and brightness.

Now, ‘he who would have friends must show himself friendly’; hence, little as her natural tenacity and reserve of disposition inclined her to the forming of new intimacies,—for when all has been said and done, it must be admitted that, save in rare instances, new friendships, at their best, seem somehow to lack just that intangible *something* which would make them quite as dear to the heart as are the old,—the devoted mother had responded with such gracious and attractive cordiality to the overtures of new-found acquaintances, that a circle of very enjoyable associates should soon have been theirs; while the musical talents of both, would also have proven for them an open sesame into the charms of music’s delightful world.

But Robert, now a *hater* of his *kind*,—a *critic* even of his *God*,—because of the selfishness of one man, the supposed perfidy of one girl, would have none of them; but wholly unappreciative of his mother's loving offices in his behalf, and indifferent, seemingly, to the lonely life to which his course must inevitably consign her, in moody moroseness, persisted in shutting himself out from all the healing influences of social intercourse, and in an abnormal hardening of heart against sympathy for his fellows, while unjustly cherishing a sentiment of rancorous resentment against them.

Perhaps never, was there a more striking exemplification of that trite old saying that 'we none of us know one another,' than in his case; for surely, we who have had knowledge of his many noble and admirable characteristics from childhood, could never have foreseen his transition from the unusually loving, unselfish son, into one in whom the very demon of selfishness now seemed regnant.

At the same time, that sublimely *selfless mother* love which, asking for so little in return, demands nothing and accepts even less, with almost abasing alacrity, aye, oftentimes with almost fawning adulation; which seems to count it as joy to be privileged to unloose the shoes latchet of an unworthy child, that love, held such contrasting sway in the heart of the disappointed and sorely tried mother, that never might so much as the *thought* of *reproach* find lodg-

ment there; so filled to overflowing was it with yearning sympathy, though burdened with sorrow and with anxious forebodings as to the ultimate effect upon him, of the unhealthy mental and spiritual atmosphere in which the morbid young man seemed determined to live.

True, there were unbearable moments, when in secret rebelling against the seeming injustice of it all, her heart would cry out,—‘Oh, why was this heavy trial sent upon me! what have I done to deserve so dreadful a punishment as this! Oh, why could it not all have been different?’ Yet all such outbursts would invariably end in a sense of subdued thankfulness that worse had not befallen; worse, in that her now misanthropic boy should have sought solace for his woes in ruinous dissipation; for, in fairness, it must be said, that up to this point, she had been spared this added sorrow,—common enough in like cases.

And in truth, great cause had the mother for the deepest thankfulness upon this score; for though unknown *to* her, yet because of love *for* her, Robert was now waging an heroic struggle against the temptation to just such a course; a struggle, which many times threatened to prove an unequal one and end in failure. But possessed, fortunately, of an ambition to rise in the world, his salvation had lain in an overwhelming immersion of himself in his work; and being both apt and diligent, his devotion had been rewarded with advancement of which she might well be and was, justly proud.

Yet while his success had been gratifying to the pride of both, it had brought to the young man himself, not unmixed happiness; for although he had won the open appreciation of his employers, the pleasure of this had been in a measure offset by the envy, and consequent ill-will, of his fellow-workers, while his self-centered aloofness with both, had effectually shut him out from the love of both; so that he stood, as it were, alone among them.

But gratifying as merited advancement may be, all work and no play is apt to make Jack not only a dull boy, but in time, a bad one as well. The imperative need for rejuvenating relaxation upon the part of her creatures, is written in unmistakable characters all over the face of Nature. The glowing skies at eventide; the leafless trees of Autumn; the ebbing tides upon the shore; all speak of a period of restful refreshment. Yet Robert's relaxations, even, had been altogether lacking in healthful variety, since they had been little more than a burying of himself in books; truly the most exhilarating and lasting of tonics, as well as the best of friends, if properly chosen, but the subtlest of poisons and worst of foes, if not; and in harmony with the now hard, rebellious attitude of his mind towards life and the world, his omnivorous reading had been little calculated to uplift or strengthen by increasing his faith in the goodness and wisdom of his God, and the integrity of his fellow men.

Thus had the depressing years gone by; one, two,

three. Years whose exceptional history we have but merely outlined, because that the unwholesome monotony of the disheartening days as they came and went, had furnished so few of heartening details with which to fill in the sketch. Yet do we shrink less from the mention of this dearth of heartening detail, which the disappointing days had known, than from the bitter happenings which steeped so many subsequent ones in sadness and shame and gloom; but since such knowledge is necessary to the completion of our story, nothing but unwarranted delay can result from the longer withholding of them from the reader; so without further preamble, we make known the sad fact, that the temptation which had for long been luring Robert Manning to seek rest and quietude of heart in the deadening bowl, at length gained the mastery.

Nor was it to be wondered at that the young man should have ultimately arrived at this enslaved condition; for we know that there is always a pre-determining mental cause, or causes, for every physical state. Has not Hippocrates, the Father of Medicine, in averring that our natures are the physicians of our diseases, implied also the responsibility of those natures for the existence of disease? And surely our latter-day authorities assert with equal boldness, that being a gregarious animal, the social factor counts for so much in mankind, that ordinarily, people do not thrive, but pine, when they live or work or eat

alone; and also, that a sedentary life,—such as this young man had lived both in his work and recreation,—is an unbalanced existence, in which the life force, in its struggle for manifestation along physical lines, causes a feeling of unrest; to overcome which, many people take to drink.

Be this as it may, we know that from the first, although by nature genial, Robert Manning had withdrawn from companionship, and spurning sympathy, had shut himself up with a steely heart in the closet of memory, alone with his burdensome grief; than which nothing can bring about a more unhealthy physical or spiritual tone. The one cloud upon the horizon of his life, he had unwisely allowed to obscure the abounding blue of its skies. He had remembered only the stinging bed of nettles which had suddenly sprung up to border his pathway, forgetful of the broad meadows, carpeted with their soft green grass, through which it lay; he had peered only into the impenetrable midnight, with its thick darkness; blinding the eyes of his soul to the sublime mysteries of the dawn, the fierce yet blessed brightness of the noonday, the entrancing beauties of the sunset's afterglow, the reposeful calm of twilight. He had so suffused his being with the enervating miasma of gloomy thoughts, that after three years of ineffectual struggle amid the unfavorable conditions with which he had seen fit to surround himself, his weakened will had become unequal to the contest, and he had been

drawn into the threatening maelstrom of strong drink. He had fought, 'tis true; but he had not, like a good soldier, endured to the end.

Oh, how many a doting mother has been called to drink of the same 'waters of Marah,' from which *his* now drank to the full! And not the least of her sorrow perhaps, was the remembering of happier things; sorrow's crown of sorrow; as the Laureate has put it. The calling to mind of days when Life had seemed to regard *her* happiness as its especial object of concern and favor; so lavish had been its gifts. And even when an evil hour had fallen upon her, wherein must be meted out a bitter cup, had yet sweetened it with the unselfish consideration of her noble boy, and an inspiring vision of the wonderful promise of his future.

But now—how changed it all was! And the full significance and extent of the change had never been really borne in upon her, until a season of haunting fear had given way to vague suspicion, and suspicion had, in turn, been made certainty, on one never-to-be-forgotten night; when, hoping against hope, with anxious heart and tense nerve, she had waited and listened for the young man's belated homecoming; starting at every unusual sound, straining her ear to catch every faintest echo which fell upon it; until in the early hours of another day, her heart had sickened to hear his stumbling feet unsteadily mounting the steps which led to their home. And when the door to which she

had wearily dragged herself to admit him opened, and he had lurched forward into the hall, cursing the key-hole which had eluded him,—Oh, the dense blackness; the inconceivable agony of a moment like *that*, to a *mother such as Robert Manning's!*

‘The heart knoweth its own bitterness’; and it would therefore be vain for another to attempt to depict the horrors of those awful hours, as the so cruelly enlightened mother sat, weeping and praying by turns at the bedside of her ‘only joy,’ now lying in a beastly stupor, sleeping off the effects of intoxication. Nor would it perhaps be any less impossible to portray the shame, the remorse, the loathing of himself which filled the heart of the culprit when he at length awakened, sobered and again himself, to look up into the saddened, sorrowful face, fixed with such tender yearning upon his own. The face to which the visible lines of suffering and the heavy eyes with their reddened, swollen lids, seemed to have added *years* since he had left her the evening before—‘for a little while,’ as he told her,—with a careless goodbye, which for once, had lacked the customary, even if now, at times, perfunctory kiss.

“I don’t ask you to forgive me, mother”; he had told her, after a long tirade of the most bitter, but alas! vain denunciation of himself; “for it cannot be that a mother’s love, not even one like yours, can overlook such cruel ingratitude as I have been guilty of. Nor should you, for I don’t deserve it; although my heart has become such a load within me of late,

mother, that it seemed I simply *must* have something to distract me, to make it impossible for me to remember, for a while, in order to go on living at all. And in fact," he went on to affirm, "if it had not been for the thought of leaving *you* alone, I should have put an end to it all before now. But yet I *do* ask you for what will be even harder to give, I fear, your confidence. Only let me feel that I have that once more, Mother," he begged, "as I had it in those better and happier days when I was more worthy of being called the son of my parents, and I vow to Heaven! that this, my first over-indulgence,—which was not to satisfy a taste for the vile stuff, which I loathe, but to help me forget,—shall *never* be repeated."

"A mother's love, my dear child," replied the weeping mother, tenderly, "concerns itself only with the excusing of an offense; not forgiving; for in her heart resentment finds no place; while as for my confidence, it is absolute; for I feel sure that you could never bring yourself to cause me such suffering as you have tonight, a second time."

"*Thank* you, mother, for your free and loving forgiveness and unhesitating confidence; that is all I can say"; faltered Robert, with moist eye, and a grateful pressure of the loved hand held clasped within his own. "But of one thing you may be certain; I will never grieve you again by yielding to this temptation; *never!*"

"I *know* you will not, Robert, and yet I have long

feared for just such a climax as this to the course you have been pursuing"; returned the mother, gently. "This steeling of your heart against all healing influences, and cherishing such vindictive thoughts and feelings towards your Heavenly Father,—the infinite love and wisdom of whose dealings with them, none of his creatures should presume to question,—has worried me beyond measure, as you know. It has been the bitterest drop in my cup of sorrow, to see the glorious promise of your boyhood and youth in this respect, unrealized; and could I even now, hear you say, regarding this temptation—'by the grace of God,' rather than, 'I vow to Heaven,' it would be most cheering to me; for I should see in it a more promising spiritual tone, which would lead you to look to the Source of all strength, to keep you from falling."

"Our ideas differ as to the looking to the 'Source of all strength,' to which you allude, Mother," returned the son, reverently; "but perhaps the difference is more in form than effect. You know I believe that one *can* be, what he *wills* to be; and I see now that my mistake,—sin if you will, hitherto,—has been in not exercising my *will* as I should. But your assurance of unshaken confidence in me, will make me stronger to do so now; and you will hereafter find me the good and true son that I would and should be; of that you can rest assured, best and dearest of mothers," he concluded; clasping his reassured parent in his arms, and kissing her again and again.

"Very good, my son," answered the hopeful mother, approvingly. "I, too, believe emphatically in the power of the human will, but not unaided," she went on to qualify, "for it is so woefully hampered by the weaknesses of the flesh. So 'watch and pray, that you enter not into *temptation*,' my precious child, and may God be very sensibly with you always."

The great Apostle to the Gentiles, when he exclaimed, 'To *will* is present with me, but how to *perform* that which I would, I find not'; while voicing, as he did in that epigrammatic form, the disheartened plaint of struggling, sinning humanity as a whole, might as truly have been rehearsing the individual experiences of Robert Manning, whose 'first over-indulgence' alas! proved not to be his last; although we considerably drop the veil of silence over the sad scenes attending his subsequent lapses; more and more frequent in their recurrence as the fatal appetite for itself which alcohol creates, became dominant enough to often over-ride the one deterring influence still active within him; his unquestionably deep love for his mother.

Yet could he see that mother's hair silvering, her eye losing the brightness and her step the spring of hope, see her fading, ageing prematurely, through eating out of her heart because of him, and still be deluded into the supposition that his transient periods of forgetfulness, offset the subsequent billows of remorse which rolled over his unhappy soul. His con-

duct both angered and excited to pity; for now in the very flower of life,—he had reached his twenty-fifth year, and a splendid-looking six-footer he was, who appeared not to carry a single ounce of superfluous flesh in his two hundred avoirdupois,—with a naturally determined and forceful character, strength of will in proportion to physical strength seemed strangely so lacking in him at this time, that ‘Ichabod’ might most fittingly have been inscribed over the gate-way to his young manhood. Should we have looked for the secret of his decline, however, it would not have been hard to find; Robert had been brought up in the way he should go, but he had unwisely chosen to repudiate the God of his fathers.

How gladly would we refrain from reference to the two years, the one preceding, the other following this period; omit the dark chapter which their history injects into our story; but we may not. The constant fear and dread, the alternations between despair and hope, incident to the periodical transgressings and repentings, laid upon the distraught mother all and more than she could well bear of heart-ache, and wrought in her the many disastrous effects of deep, wearing anxiety. Anxiety, too, unrelieved by even an occasional expression of friendly sympathy; for Robert’s altered habits must be concealed from the very few friends whom she had allowed herself to cultivate; and from the smiling exterior presented to the world, none could have guessed her bitter secret.

Oh, how real and vivid now became that portion of the poet's words: 'All that grief hath known of hopes laid waste, Knells in that word—Alone!' for aside from the loving and encouraging—'Don't be a grievin' so, me darlint! sure an' it's betther days that's a comin'; ventured now and again by the faithful old servant,—who could not long be kept in ignorance of the doings of her young master,—there was no comforting—'Be of good cheer,' whispered in her ear, to fan the oft-times flickering flame of hope.

Yet, though unsought, outside sympathy *did* come at last; as deep and sincere as it was sudden and unexpected; but the open disgrace which evoked it, proved, unhappily, to be the proverbial 'final straw that breaks the camel's back.'

Now through drink, Robert Manning had also been led into the distraction of gambling; the *races* and *poker* becoming his pastime; although for a considerable time, the much worried mother had been happily without knowledge of this new cause for solicitude. His attendance upon the former had thus far been limited to the weekly half holiday from business; where he had one day been discovered by their most intimate friend, the very Mr. Elliott to whose interest and influence the young man was indebted for his business connection. An enlightening letter to the mother was the result; 'for,' wrote that good and true friend, 'I lack the courage to tell you in person such things as I now feel to be necessary. It is between

ourselves, however, for let me assure you right here, dear Mrs. Manning, that I have not spoken at home even, of the deplorable change which has taken place in Robert. I will refer first to his indulgence in liquor.

Many times during the last few months, he has gone back to the office from luncheon at the club which he frequents, so intoxicated as to be unfit for business the rest of the day. Out of consideration for me, Mr. C. has screened him in his private sanctum at such times, where he has slept off the effects; so that by the time he returned home at evening, you have probably never suspected the condition he had been in but a few hours before. I never saw any one else who sobered up so quickly and carried no traces; a few hours of sleep and he is apparently his normal self again. I have talked to Robert repeatedly, and pleaded with him to let the dangerous stuff alone, and each time, deeply penitent, he has promised; but still he continues.

Now Mr. C. values his services, and because of this at first—latterly, I must admit, through my intervention—has retained him in his employ. Gambling, however, is something he simply will not tolerate in an employee, and much as I shrink from telling you this, Robert, I find, is much addicted to this bad habit also. Rumors to the effect that he was, and was also a constant and reckless bettor, had reached Mr. C.'s ears,—the boy seems unfortunately to have many more enemies than friends—and yesterday he was told

of it again, and that Robert would be at the track this afternoon. Hoping to disprove the rumor by so doing, I myself went over to see, and found the statement but too true; Robert was not only there, but much under the influence of drink beside, and making himself very uncreditably conspicuous among a most unworthy looking lot of associates; I could not have felt worse to see my own boy in such company.

It is very hard for me to write you thus, dear friend, but I feel that it is neither right nor wise nor even possible, for me to keep these things from your knowledge any longer, for *I* have no lasting influence over Robert; *you* are the only one who has and can save him. Not, of course, that he is any longer a child and subject to your control, but the mere fact of your knowing how he is going on, will be enough to bring him to himself, I believe; for he has been overwhelmed with remorse for his conduct, upon your account, whenever I have had occasion to talk with him about it.

I know this great change in him has all resulted from his continued brooding over that disastrous love affair, which *was* an exceptionally hard experience, I admit. Still, considering his birth, training, and strong nature, I must confess I would have expected Robert to meet it more like a man; and as he no doubt would have done, had he been older.

In closing, dear friend, let me assure you of my deep sympathy in this trying situation, and of my wish to be of further service to you if I can. If you want

advice or assistance of any kind, call on me without hesitation; and I hope you may find some comfort in the assurance of my perfect confidence, that now that *you* know, we shall have no cause for like anxiety about Robert again.'

Oh, what news for *any* mother, under *any* circumstances, to receive! but especially for *this* mother under *these*. The shadow cast by that indisputable damning—though friendly—letter, put in total eclipse the one ray of sunshine which yet illumined her darkened life; for through all her worry and mortification, the thought by which she had been upheld, had been that her galling secret the world knew not of; but *now*, hope was cut off even in that direction. It *nau-seated* her to think of the groundless delusion under which she had been laboring; that while she had been striving so hard to present a smiling face, a care-free demeanor to their friends, *this one* friend, at least, possibly others, had been seeing the reverse side of the picture and had been pitying her. And then her heart sank still lower, as she suddenly remembered how that it was Robert himself who had led her into this miserable delusion, by declaring again and again, that he "never so much as *looked* at the vile stuff during the day."

And with the realization that, notwithstanding her devotion, forbearance, confidence, he could bring himself to deliberately *lie* to her, that formerly so high-minded he was no longer truthful, and that henceforth

she must take his most positive assertions even with an element of distrust; *he*, the child whom she had borne, reared so carefully, loved so unselfishly and worshipped almost idolatrously, when *this* realization, coupled with the knowledge of additional shortcomings, association with degrading companions, and the shame of discovery and publicity, finally took hold, *firm* hold of her reluctant consciousness, stung to the quick, the crushed spirit of the mother died within her, and mind weakened, while body succumbed; for—

Hope disappointed, cankers; chills;
The very life-blood sips.

And this *utterly* disappointed one could stand the strain no longer.

Two months of prostration followed this collapse; months filled with as great suffering for the stricken one as they long were for Robert with deepest anxiety and concern as to the outcome. But when the mother could again think and talk clearly, she said and said truly, that she would gladly have gone through it all, and more, for the sake of the restored son, so assiduous in his attendance upon her, once more tender and affectionate in his intercourse, so solicitous for her recovery and determined, even in the most critical hour, not to give her up, so bowed down with grief for all he had brought upon her. Who had won his way back to the full confidence of their anxious friend, and the renewed esteem of his employer.

For Robert Manning, devoured with shame and remorse, had taken himself so masterfully in hand when he learned of his mother's fuller knowledge of his disgraceful habits and saw its dire effect upon her, as to show himself a man indeed; well worthy of the tolerance which had spared him the ignomy of dishonorable dismissal from a good and lucrative position.

CHAPTER XI.

NON COMPOS MENTIS.

"For to the **dead mind** of the **living mother** he was but as a stranger."

Excessive joy sometimes kills; but not so in the case of Margaret Manning, for *her* joy, though most excessive, was of the sort which invigorates only. In a glorious resurrection morn, buried hope had come forth from its sepulcher in her heart and found realization; and—

Hope realized, of sparkling wine,
Holds chalice to the lips.

And this wine, which she now drank from a *brimming* chalice, was as the wine of life to her; whose sparkle soon banished the dullness of eye, and coursing through the bloodless veins, brought back to her cheek a shade of its wonted color; herald of renewed vitality and returning strength. And the smile which played about her mouth was no longer studied and a hollow mockery, because feigned, but spontaneous, and filled with the joy of satisfied contentment. For the mother had again come into her own at last; the unselfish consideration and grateful devotion of the son

of her love, the idol of her heart, whose single aim it now was to cover the sad and blighting memories of a past, with the joyous experiences of a happy present.

And not of a happy present only, but of a delightful future as well; for bent upon making the fullest possible amends for his failings, Robert had not only unselfishly suggested, but also insisted upon, a return to the home city, from which he well knew the *heart* of his parent had never been separated.

"Give up the flat from May 1st, mother," he advised. "That will leave us more than six weeks to sell out in; we will surely find a buyer long before that."

Now it would have been strange, indeed, if such a suggestion had not caused the heart of Margaret Manning to bound with joy; yet stranger still, if she had not at first demurred at acceptance of the generous proposal. But when the soft sentimentalities of mother-love had been silenced by the logic of cold reason, the wisdom and greater safety of the change appealing to her, it was gratefully accepted.

The plan for the intended move being carried out as proposed, the days were happy days for both, while they waited—though not impatiently—for the purchaser who did not at once appear; for time was yet needed to restore to the convalescent the strength needed to fortify against the fatigue of travel. Then there were some few little parting civilities to be accepted and returned, and these social duties were now

to spell real pleasure for Margaret Manning, because of her son's interest and participation in them.

"We shall be but little apart hereafter," became the frequent whisper of her happy heart; and living in that blessed assurance, the grateful mother gave herself up to rest joyfully in it and recuperate for the prospective home-going, which her May-day anniversary was to begin.

One intervening, early April evening, when the tempering ocean breezes were refreshingly fanning the perspiring faces of the city's inhabitants, after one of its rare, and therefore prostrating days of extremely high temperature for that climatically most favored locality, Robert, tired and exhausted from a very busy day in a super-heated office, had started out for an airing at the beach; to whose miles of sandy stretch the populace was wont to flock in great numbers, under all such provocation.

"Look for me about eleven, mother," he had said, as he bade his parent an affectionate good-night. "Don't sit up for me though, for you need all the sleep you can get these days."

Accordingly, with a heart now blessedly free from all misgivings, the mother had retired at a seasonable hour to a sweet and sound *first* sleep; from which the pealing bell of a near-by church at length awakened her to the knowledge that midnight had come again, but not Robert; for the hall light still burned for the absent son.

Knowing the fascination of the beach on such nights, however, and how late the crowds were given to lingering in the open, loath to leave the salty fragrance and reviving coolness of the ocean, she reminded herself of the sudden, simultaneous rush for home which always took place about this hour, and the consequent delay in getting even a foothold aboard the densely packed street cars; and drowsily thinking, 'it will be one, probably, before he gets here,' had dropped off into another untroubled slumber.

But when the bell's *solitary* stroke again brought the woman to herself, the light outside her room yet burned. Still, the hour was not an unseasonable one for such an occasion, and sleeping more lightly now, most of another hour had been passed in alternate dozings and wakings.

Two o'clock however, found the now very uneasy mother, too nervous to remain longer in bed, lightly robed and seated in the circular, corner window of an adjoining room, which commanded a view of two streets. O, how *many* times had she sat in that same window before, eagerly watching now in this direction, now that, through the long, silent hours of the night, for her boy's return. And what home-comings those had been! Yet even as she shuddered at the sickening remembrance of them, her heart went out in deepest thankfulness that they were now but the fading memories of an unhallowed past, impossible of repetition, for her dear one had come to himself.

"And now, O, Lord," she fervently breathed,—once more voicing the prayer often upon her lips and constantly within her heart—"continue Thy work of grace, I beseech Thee, until he shall have said, 'I will arise and go to my Father.' " Thus the anxious night wore slowly on.

Another hour of vain watching passed; and now, with alarm added to uneasiness, the distracted mother began an almost constant using of her 'phone; calling up in close succession, first one, then another of the offices of the various Dailies. "Had any accident been reported since evening—or drowning at the beach—or hold-up—or sudden death or prostration from the excessive heat of the day?" For that Robert had been the victim of some such accident or happening, she was so very sure, that the negative replies received in each case, seemed almost to disappoint rather than relieve.

And now came Winnie, the maid of all work—of late the only attendant upon her mistress—with her coaxing—"take this bit iv a biscuit and sup o' wine, me darlint." But Margaret Manning could have *flown* as easily as to have swallowed a morsel or drop of anything by this time, for her nervousness had grown intolerable; driving her from 'phone to window, from window to 'phone. But the church bell had pealed forth the hour of four, and still her aching eyes had not been eased nor her burdened heart gladdened, with the sight of a loved figure upon the street, and her

repeated inquiries for the news she sought had begun to annoy, and elicit but a short 'No' in response.

The periodical 'cuckoo, cuckoo,' from the Swiss clock in the diningroom, and the gentle ticking of the dainty French one upon the mantel of the little parlor in which they sat,—for devoted Winnie had insisted upon remaining to share her mistress' vigil—alike, now wrought so raspingly upon the strained sensibilities of Margaret Manning, that she was grateful indeed, when instinctively, the woman had quietly slipped from the room with the one, and closed the doors between her and the other. And although it was simply unendurable, she felt truly sorry in her heart to request the loving soul to desist from the bits of intended cheering conversation, that she would now and then attempt.

Agitation reached a climax however, when the quiet of the night was soon after broken by a man's thick, husky voice singing—

'Here's good luck to whiskey,
For it makes you feel so frisky;
Drink it down, drink it down, drink it down!'

for then it was that a horrible *fear* entered her mind. "Can it be? Again? After all?" she questioned frantically with herself; as she tottered, shivering with nervous dread, to the window, and strained her eyes for a moment to peer through the dimness of the semi-lighted street. But sank back upon her chair with a

smothered—"No, thank God!" as the drunken singer, a man much older than Robert, staggered across the street and up the steps of an opposite house, from an upper window of which a guiding light faintly streamed.

"Robert was never noisy like that," she reminded herself, with a feeling of satisfaction; and then her heart stood still for a second, gripped again by that horrible *fear*; for she had just before interviewed the men of news again, and received the same unsatisfactory answer.

"But no! it is not so!" she burst out at length, as if to drive away the awful thought;—unheeding the presence of her companion. "Robert is dead! *dead* I say, or hurt and unable to get home! He never stayed away from me a whole night before. Oh, my boy! my boy! Where shall I look for you? How shall I come to you?"

And pale and haggard, the unhappy woman now began a restless pacing back and forth; back and forth; longing for the break of day, that she might *do* something; glad indeed when the noisy rattle of the milk and bread wagons over the hard pavements of the deserted streets, began to tell of its oncoming. And when, later, rising from behind the beautiful, green Berkeley hills across the vast bay which she overlooked, a pale yellowness began slowly diffusing itself along the Eastern sky, she exclaimed triumphantly, "They can't keep it from me much longer

Winnie; I shall soon have my paper now!" For in her ravening eagerness for news, the constantly disappointed inquirer—whose recently disturbed mind had scarcely yet regained its perfect equilibrium—had finally come to believe that this was being purposely withheld from her.

When next the church bell pealed, it proclaimed the interminable dark hours of the night at an end; and just as the little bird in the dining-room was sallying gaily forth again, to call attention to the fact that the first half hour of a new daylight had passed, the sharp crack of the tightly twisted morning paper against the front door, was heard; and Winnie, leaving the post of vantage from which she had been so steadily watching, hurried below to bring to her mistress the long wished-for sheet.

Startled by the sudden though familiar thud, Margaret Manning came to an abrupt pause in her restless pacing, as the woman left the room; and with heart in mouth, and the terrific pressure of blood upon her ear-drums from its rapid beating all but deafening her, put forth a mighty effort to calm and prepare herself for what might await. Being by now so possessed by that terrible *fear*, that in spite of all efforts at self-control, the nerveless limbs shook so under her as to compel a dropping down into the *conversazione* by which she stood, in order to keep from falling; and a-tremble from head to foot, it was with an almost palsied hand that she took the untwisted

sheet from a maid, scarcely less agitated than herself. For Winnie McCaffrey would have given her *life* for this mother and son; both of whom she had proudly dandled upon her knees in infancy, from whom she had never been separated, and around whom the abiding love of her warm, Irish heart, had ever since twined. So she stood by now, breathlessly waiting for *her* share in the expected bad news, for which her over-wrought mistress was excitedly running her eye up and down the columns of the printed page.

All at once, the paper slid to the floor, as the hands which had been holding it, suddenly relaxing, dropped limply into the lap; and dazed and stunned, the mother, with the despairing look of some closely pursued wild creature in her eyes, looked appealingly up, staring speechless into the anxious face of her companion. For this was the happening that she had read, sensationally detailed at length, with bold headlines, in the outer column of the Journal's first page:

"POKER GAME IN SWELL DEN ON
P—— STREET RAIDED!

TWENTY PROMINENT YOUNG MEN, REGULAR
FREQUENTERS OF THE PLACE,
ARRESTED!"

And then, heading the list of those who had been locked up as not having sufficient money left with which to pay the required fine, with their occupations

and addresses, was the name of 'Robert Armstrong Manning.'

"Oh, what is it, me darlint; what is it?" screamed the frightened maid; dropping to her knees beside her mistress and chafing the cold, clammy hands. "What is it has happened to Masther Robert? Tell me, me darlint, tell me, an' don't luk at me the loiks o' that! O, howly Mother o' God, defend us!" she cried; devoutly crossing herself.

At the sound of the other's voice, the deadened faculties of the stricken mother seemed to waken to a sense of needed action, and bring back the power of thought and speech; and jumping to her feet she shrieked, "My clothes, Winnie, my clothes! bring me my clothes! and money, Winnie! money and a knife! They haven't told the truth, Winnie! Robert is *dead*—he was drowned at the beach—and they won't bury him! They have put him in jail, Winnie! In jail! Don't you hear me!" she demanded, as though provoked at receiving no reply; "*A Manning is in jail!* Bring my clothes, Winnie!" she again commanded, impatiently; "And money! And a knife! I must go kill the man who *dared* send *Robert Armstrong's grandson* to jail!"

And still calling wildly for her clothes, and tearing frantically at the fastenings of her *robe-de-chambre*, the yet physically weak, and now demented woman, sank down, exhausted by her furious outburst. For demented she was in very truth. The blow to family

name and honor and pride, had proven 'the final straw.'

Soothing her mistress with the promise of the things for which she clamored, the quick-witted maid slipped quickly to the 'phone in the hall, and called for a number. "Me mistress is dyin' me masther's dead an' they won't bury 'im an' o fer the luv uv Hivin coom quick!" she shouted into the receiver. And to such purpose, that by the time the dressing of her mistress—prolonged by every subterfuge her inventive brain could devise—had been accomplished, the friend who scarce three months earlier had offered just such assistance as was now needed, was there to render it.

A charnel house were a preferable home to the one to which Robert Manning returned a few hours later; for to the *dead mind* of the *living mother*, he was now but as a stranger; to whom, in common with all who came near, she told a never-ending, pathetic tale about "a baby who deceived me, and was drowned for it one warm night in Lake Sylvanus, and whom they won't bury."

The other inevitable penalties to be paid for his fatal indulgence, were severe indeed. The bitter denunciation of heart-broken—though loving—Winnie, the reproaches and forfeited confidence of interested friends; the scarcely concealed sneers of envious business associates, glad of his downfall; the meeting and squaring of himself with his employer, at least to a sufficient degree to escape the disgrace of instant dismissal; the ineffaceable recollection of having been in

the hands of the *Law*, with the withering *shame* of it, these were humiliating and bitter beyond conception. But to look into the vacant eyes and expressionless face, and listen to the unintentionally accusing chatter of the wrecked mother, whom he upbraided himself 'It had been far less cruel to have slain,' *this* was the punishment that well nigh *crazed* Robert Manning, and in a day, added ten years to his apparent age. She listened without comprehension or interest, to his really *true* story of having been drawn unwittingly into the game which he had not once before indulged in since the race-track episode, and never would again; but his visible remorse and piteous appeals for forgiveness, made not the least impression; for she to whom they were made, was no longer *compos mentis*.

But, 'how oft the penitential tear, bedews the mourner's cheek.' Could the mother only have known that at last, like the Prodigal's of old, the penitent 'Father, I have sinned!' of *her* humbled, wandering boy had also been spoken, the joy in her heart would have soon have brought back the light of reason to her eye, we think.

The sorry situation was not altogether without encouragement however, for the case was diagnosed as but a harmless dementia, such as frequently followed nervous shock, and which, if the patient were kept unfretted and so, tranquil in mind, well fortified with sleep and nourishing food, would soon pass; no worse developments were anticipated.

But an anxious week went by without improvement, with no noticeable change, in fact. Then, suddenly, the talkativeness ceased and gave place to absolute silence for a couple of days; during which, with the knitted brow of deep, hard thought, the afflicted woman seemed making a strenuous, though at first *vain* attempt to remember something. For giving up in apparent despair now and then, she would shake her head in a hopelessly disappointed way, and rising dejectedly, would again tread the floor aimlessly for hours; after which, another evident struggle with memory would begin.

At last, in the midst of one of these wearying mental periods, the intensely absorbed look upon her face was seen all at once to change to one of enlightenment, but also, distress; and in a horrified whisper the one word 'jail!' fell just once from the parted lips.

It was a gruesome enough word to hear her speak, and yet it caused rejoicing, for it proved memory to be returning; the mind was awakening, so there seemed good reason to hope for the speedy recovery so confidently prophesied.

But instead of the mind awakening to clearness as was expected, the mania changed to a worse; a homicidal one; and during the night, the sharp report of a pistol was heard in Robert's room, and a bullet went whizzing across the bed but a few inches above the young man's head. Had it not been for the untiring vigilance of the watchful servant, he would have been

murdered by the irresponsible mother who had cunningly eluded the wornout nurse, snatching a bit of needed rest, at her side. For Winnie had stolen from her room and crept behind her passing mistress as stealthily as she, to the bedside of the dozing son, and knocked up the cocked weapon just quick enough to prevent a most pitiable tragedy.

An immediate removal of his patient from home, was now advised by the astounded physician; but the unwilling son would not consider the proposition, even, until a desperate attempt upon her own life with a long forgotten razor, the following day, had also been foiled. Then, raving and unmanageable, the woman's condition became so dangerous, that for her personal safety, Robert had been forced to consent; and with all possible dispatch, the maniac mother was committed to one of the State hospitals for the care of like, poor unfortunates.

CHAPTER XII.

EARTHQUAKE AND FIRE.

"During those more than fifty **awful** seconds, * * * the astounded man * * * lay limp, motionless, breathless; hushed, as it were, by the sense of an awesome Presence, whose commanding: 'Be still! and know that I am God!' he divined rather than heard."

"The city is **burning** and there is **no water!** **we are doomed!** **We are doomed!**" they cried, with ashen faces."

Self-condemnation is a goad,
A scourge of many cords,
Which guilty hearts relentless flays,
Nor peace nor joy affords.
What though the injured one forgive,
Most fully and most free?
So long as mine own heart accuse,
Life's but a Hell for me.

Lashed by the scourge of an accusing conscience, wrung with contrition for the course of wrong doing which had begat such grievous results, haunted by a never-fading vision of the wild-eyed mother, whom—with devoted Winnie as temporary attendant—he had that day conveyed to her place of incarceration, Robert Manning, as haggard and emaciated from worry as from loss of sleep and food, was but an unrecogniza-

ble wreck of himself when he reached the city of San Francisco again, upon his return from that repugnant, that gloomy trip.

It was late evening, when at the city's great thoroughfare—world-renowned Market Street—he stepped from the closed carriage in which the journey had been made; for he had not yet sufficient command of himself to venture back to the now desolated flat upon the hill, from whence all that had made of it the charming and lovable home that it was, had that day been forcibly removed.

Not that he willed to drown his sorrow in drink and the game as hitherto; *that* inclination was happily now gone from the chastened man, *forever*. But to spend this *first* night there, alone with his *unendurable* thoughts and memories, spend it upon the scene of the hideous occurrences which had transpired within that home but just now, would drive him too, mad, he felt. "By tomorrow it will be different"; he communed with himself; "but tonight, I must have light and sound and people."

So, although his brain seemed a seven times heated furnace, his head swam, his knees bent under him as he set foot upon the pavement, and he shook as with an ague, the wretched man began a feverish tramping back and forth along the miles of sidewalk flanking the princely street, from the imposing Ferry Building at one end, to Twin Peaks at the other.

Yet 'light and sound and people' combined, could

not release his fettered thoughts from the tyrannous thralldom of a few long forgotten, but self-accusing verses, which he remembered to have read sometime, somewhere, and which it seemed to him had burned themselves thus deep into his consciousness on purpose to come forth and torture him at this time. For as if written in letters of flame, there danced ever before his eyes as he walked :

‘I made the cross *myself*, whose weight,
Was later laid on me.
This thought is *anguish*, as I toil
Up life’s steep Calvary.’

‘To think *mine own hands* drove the nails!
I sang a merry song,
And chose the heaviest wood I had,
To make it firm and strong.’

‘Had I but known, had I but *dreamed*,
Its weight was meant for *me*,
I would have made a lighter cross,
To bear up Calvary.’

O, how perfectly did the incriminating words fit his case. Had he come across them but now, he could have believed a knowledge of his own miserable conduct to have inspired them. And as perfectly as they fitted his case, just so truly did they speak the lan-

guage of his heart; for surely, could he have foreseen the bitterness, the possibility of an hour like this, he would have made no such burden for himself to bear. Would it ever be lifted from his shoulders? he wondered. He doubted it; for although the doctors held out still stronger hopes of his mother's recovery under experienced care, and amid such favorable surroundings, they had already been disappointed in their expectations, and he had but little faith in any of their opinions now. But even should they be right, he could never *forget*; and *memory* would make of life a *Hell* of Hells for him, hereafter. "No, I shall have to toil on up the thorny steep with my self-imposed burden, to a Golgotha!" he mused, gloomily.

Once the brooding man wandered to the end of an adjacent wharf and looked longingly into the tempting waters; but a suspicious watchman soon came and ordered him off. And more times than one, he found it all but impossible to refrain from throwing himself before a moving street car; death would have been so welcome. But cowardly self-destruction, he realized in time, would be but his crowning act of selfishness and cruelty; for the only reparation he could now make his wronged mother was to live and care for her to the end, be it longer or shorter; let the burden of living become ever so intolerable.

Thus, tortured in mind, undistracted, unsoothed by the noise and glitter all about him, and growing hourly weaker in body—he had not tasted food for more than

two days—Robert Manning continued his wearing march up and down the long, lively street; while the usual throng of evening promenaders, grown satisfied or tired, returned to their homes, and the crowds of well-dressed loungers and would-be mashers, also disappeared from their habitual camping grounds outside the hundreds of elegantly appointed saloons and cigar stalls. And when the streaming thousands from the theatres and concert or lecture halls,—proud *pater familias* with their richly dressed wives and daughters, *debonair* gallants of his own age escorting handsome, smiling young women, groups of frivolous boys and girls conventionally chaperoned, and unattended matrons or spinsters by twos and threes—had hurried from the glittering grills, cafes and refreshment parlors to their waiting autos or to catch the late cars, the popular street presented a deserted appearance indeed; and his continued presence upon it became so conspicuous, that a good natured policeman upon the beat—whom he had already passed many times—advised him to follow the example of the rest.

“Tryin’ to walk yer feet off, man?” he ventured, pleasantly. “Better go home and rest a bit.” But Robert—not without much of effort now, however—had continued on past, without so much as raising his head or replying.

“Poor devil!” muttered the man to himself, pityingly; “Got no home ter go to, mebbe. He’s forlorn lookin’ enough to ’ave lost the last friend he had in

the wurruld. Wife's left 'im, I bet; some more of that divilish *affinity* bisness. Bigger fool he ter worry about 'er ef that's the case; it's a good reddance fer 'im. An' he oughten ter hev any trouble pickin' up another bit o' calico, with *his* years an' figger! Looks as ef 'e had the *chink*, too."

Yet it was long after this, in fact, not until the big hands of the Ferry Tower Clock were pointing to three-thirty, that the 'forlorn lookin' pedestrian,—whom he had come to speak of jocosely to himself as 'the wandering Jew'—from sheer inability to proceed further, suddenly came to an unexpected stop and sank down in a heap besides a lamppost, less than a block away. And perhaps, because he *did* look 'as ef he had the *chink*,' the big, blue-coated officer had hastened to his aid; and to his feeble—'a bed,' the exhausted man had been kindly assisted to the nearest desirable place of rest;—one of the larger and better class lodging houses on a 'South of Market' thoroughfare—where, fully attired because he was so freezing cold, albeit the night was an unusually warm one, he had crawled in under the ample bed coverings, and was soon blessedly lost to consciousness, sleeping the profound sleep of utter exhaustion, in a small, inside, fifth story room; the only available spot at that late entry into an always crowded house.

Less than two hours in the arms of Morpheus, however, and from this much needed sleep, the weary man was suddenly and rudely awakened to a sensa-

tion which, for an instant, startled him into the horrifying belief that he had been drinking again; for the bed under him seemed to be gyrating in all directions at once, as though held in the powerful clutches of some angry giant, and, moreover, shaken by him to the full limit of his enraged strength, as viciously as might an excited terrier a captured rat; it was all he could do to hold himself in.

The furniture of the room was racing about like mad. The massive, old fashioned, walnut bureau with its heavy marble top, had slid across the room and wedged itself tightly in between the door and bedstead. The several toilet articles upon the washstand—there was no running water or gas in this seldom used cubby hole—went clattering to the floor and were smashed to atoms. The tall chiffonier crashed over on to its face, shivering the beveled mirror into a thousand fragments. The hanging lamp was swinging so violently, that its heavy brass frame struck with a bang against the opposite walls, twelve feet apart, at each swing; hurling the filled, but fortunately unlighted lamp to the floor. A chimney toppling over on to the roof, sent a shower of mortar and bricks and broken glass through the skylight by which the room was lighted, on to his bed; his face and head—as by a miracle—escaping unstruck, though his eyes were filled with the blinding dust.

For it is of the year of our Lord, one thousand nine hundred and six, of which we are now writing, and

of its fateful morning of April the eighteenth. That morning when the mighty forces holding carnival beneath the Earth's crust, had reached forth, gripped a gay city in their titantic embrace, and compelled it, though sleeping, to trip with them a reeling, crazy, bacchanalian measure.

During those more than fifty *awful* seconds, into which the memories and varying emotions of a past, present and future, Time and Eternity, all seemed compressed, the astounded man,—having missed the deep, premonitory rumble heard by some less shut in than himself and whose first experience of earthquake shock this was, expecting with each lurch of the swaying room to meet death 'neath falling walls and ceiling, and paralyzed with horror at thought of his utter helplessness and inability to escape—lay limp, motionless, breathless. Hushed, as it were, by the sense of an awesome *Presence*; whose commanding—'Be still; and know that I am God!' he divined, rather than heard.

As abruptly and suddenly as it had come did the dreadful tremblor pass; and when motion seemed to have ceased, Robert Manning began a hasty throwing of the confining bricks from off his bed, and with bruised flesh but unbroken bones, got quickly upon his feet; thankful beyond expression to find a reasonably steady foundation beneath them.

But the very moment of its birth saw his relieved feeling put to rout by a new horror; the building was

surely settling, and he must get out of it and on to the street.

Springing to the door, the terrified man strove to push from before it the displaced bureau, which barred his exit from the room; but the attempt of a puny child to push Gibraltar from its base, might have been almost as prolific of results as *his* impaired strength upon the unmovable wedge.

"Oh, what should he do! Must he indeed give up his life in a trap, like this?" was his agonized thought. Not that he now valued it or would shun death. For himself, he could even have welcomed release; but for the sake of another, he must if possible save this life now in such imminent peril. "But how shall escape be had from this windowless room?" he cried. While down—down—down went the sinking building, with at least this one of its many hundred occupants, shrieking wildly but vainly for help.

Still casting frantically about for some other means of exit, however, Robert's eye went up to the shattered skylight; and jumping upon the bed, he reached for the unbroken sash. But elevated still a couple of feet above the high ceiling, tall though he was he could not make it. What was to be done? *Seconds* were *eternities* to him now, for surely the ground must soon close over the roof of the rapidly lowering house.

Snatching the thin and well-worn counterpane from the bed, the desperate man tore this into three broad strips which he knotted quickly together. Fastening

the one end securely about his waist, he then sprang again upon the bed, threw the other, rolled into a ball, over the skylight sash, and catching it as it unwound and came back into the room, drew himself up and reached a place of safety upon the roof of the fated building; from whence he leaped quickly to the sidewalk—with which it was by this time on a level—only a second or two before it disappeared from sight, swallowed up with most of its guests, like many a neighboring structure, by the made, and now yawning ground, upon which a short moment before it had so firmly stood.

Coupled with overwhelming gratitude for his own deliverance from the awful death which he saw himself to have so narrowly escaped, there was at once from Robert Manning's heart, an outpouring of deepest thankfulness that his now ungovernable mother had been taken out of the city before this calamity had come upon it; for that it *was* a calamity, and *direful*, the scene into which he had stepped most indisputably proved.

Utterly collapsed, or partially wrecked buildings, dangerously leaning ones, and many unsafe, though apparently intact because still standing, met the eye at every turn. Running the scale from cottage, flat, apartment or rooming house, in the residence portion, to the flimsy structures of the market district,—whose sudden, simultaneous fall at that early hour had caused the death of hosts of market-men, buyers and

horses—and the handsome, many-storied temples to Mammon, in the business center; glaring evidences of the havoc wrought. While tons upon tons of *debris* lay piled up in the streets, a conglomerate mass of building material,—from which a choking white dust yet lingered in the air—and every variety of household and office equipment. Telling in *part*, the great *money loss* which had been entailed upon the unfortunate community.

Miles of wrenched, twisted street car rails, still clung fantastically to upheaved or depressed roadbeds. While frequent gaping fissures in the ground, witnessed to the writhing contortions of the powers below, so recently ended; for the big clock down the street had stopped at exactly 5:13, and it was now but four minutes later by his own still ticking watch.

Thousands of scantily dressed men, women and children, who had fled terror stricken from their homes or temporary lodgings into the open, were about him; their blanched cheeks and hushed voices bearing unspoken testimony to an overwhelming sense of encounter with the Infinite. Members of unbroken families silently embraced, faintly smiling into each other's eyes the joy and thankfulness their over-full hearts forbade them to utter; while members of others less fortunate and oppressed with fear, ran wildly about, eagerly searching hither and yon among the agitated throng, for a missing loved one. And many, alas!

with streaming eyes and quivering lips, mourned for the dying and the dead. It was a weird, awful, heart-clutching, never-to-be-forgotten scene.

Yet, in the main, they were huddled together in unemotional groups, commenting in low tones upon what had occurred, and waiting, with dread expectancy written upon their faces, for—what? More, surely; perhaps even worse. For the strange deadness, the oppressive, unnatural stillness of the atmosphere, boded no good.

Nearly three hours of this tense waiting, and then came another and final frightening upheaval, which, by razing the many previously weakened structures, increased the mortality, and completed the work of demolition by earthquake.

But long ere this, a new cause for alarm had arisen. In fact, the first and great temblor was but passed, before dozens of fires had broken out in the Southern and Eastern sections of the city; and soon great banks of smoke, hung like a pall against the sky, hazily obscuring the early morning Sun. Yet no real anxiety had been felt at first, for San Francisco's confidence in the skill, valor, and prowess, of its *superior* Fire Department, was as great and unshakable as its pride was infinite and pardonable.

At length, however, a shout of horror went up. The *city is burning and there is no water! we are doomed! we are doomed!* they cried, with ashen faces.

For broken mains could supply no water to fireplugs ;
and this valiant band of fire-fighters (as brave as the
bravest ever), though battling like demons with axe
and pick and spade, could not long stay a very *tempest*
of flame, with empty hose.

Then it was that a few half-clad families, fleeing
empty-handed for their very lives to the higher
ground, became the vanguard of that continuous,
homogeneous procession of impoverished, but un-
daunted ones who, for more than two days and nights,
kept up a constant retreating from one point of sup-
posed safety to another, before the insidious approach
and shriveling heat of the insatiable fire ;

Moving onward, ever onward, uncomplaining, calm,
Grateful for each offered kindness and its healing
balm ;

Scant of dress, begrimed and wearied, their belongings
few,

Oft with La-res and Pe-na-tes hugged to bosoms true.

Until, footsore and exhausted, upwards of three
hundred thousand homeless, hungry people, had at
last reached places of safety and rest, upon the soft,
white sands of the ocean's beach, or the green swards
of the out-lying parks and pleasure grounds.

During that fearful baptism, the subject of these
pages had borne himself like a very hero ; 'a workman

that needeth not to be ashamed.' Fever burned in his veins; his famished stomach clamored for long denied food; but once more his old unselfish self, he heeded them not. From the very moment of his escape from the sinking prison in which he had been caught, gratitude for the safety of himself and his, had found expression in the performance of innumerable praiseworthy deeds of mercy and duty.

All through that first long, exhausting forenoon, he had been seen in the thick and front of a noble army of Good Samaritans who, taking their lives in their hands, forced their way to the relief of the needy; 'neath leaning walls, up tottering staircases, past darting tongues of flame and through clouds of suffocating smoke, releasing the pinioned and imprisoned, tenderly raising the helpless wounded and sick and sending them where healing and care might be found, soothing and ministering to the dying, and reverently closing the eyes and screening the set faces of the dead from the curious gaze of the vulgar and the heat and glare of the Sun, snatched yet a moment to lay their lifeless bodies out of the path of the crazed and hurrying throngs.

Then when the early afternoon had witnessed the unexpected leaping of the mighty conflagration over the supposed impassable barriers to its progress, and the ravenous flames began a mad rush in the direction of his own place of business, Robert had hastened

thither; and for five long hours had labored ceaselessly and alone, to save the valuable books and documents. For aside from himself, there was not a trusted attaché of the place—his employer included—who did not make their homes in one or other of the city's big bedrooms across the bay.

Back and forth the faithful young man hurried, carrying his heavy loads often through crackling lanes of fire, his life constantly endangered by falling timbers and crumbling walls. Climbing over great piles of smoking masonry, and picking his difficult way through tangles of twisted iron he went, until, with the thrill of satisfaction that accompanies fancied security in such a situation, he had settled down finally to mount guard over his treasures, *blocks* beyond the danger line.

But a fire which consumed a building a minute, and as though 'twere a thinking intelligence, again and again doubled back upon its track or made wide detours, to lick up whatever food for flame had been overlooked in its first furious onslaught, was not to be thus cheated of its coveted prey; and after compelling three such onerous moves, at last, gloatingly snatched his treasures from under the very nose of their routed custodian.

Heartsick at the final failure of his important undertaking, yet comforted, perforce, by the sense of a noble duty well done, Robert Manning, for the first

time, now felt himself free to think of his own home upon the brow of a centrally located hill, well on to a mile away; and towards this he now bent his steps. It was a long, hard climb for the wornout limbs, and yet to turn his back for a little upon the roar and hiss of the maddening blaze, and exchange the harrowing scenes of the day for those less awful and depressing, was relieving; for, although evidences in plenty of the disastrous work of disturbed Nature were not lacking even in this more favored locality, his eyes were here spared the dismal sight of gutted buildings and blackened walls, and battalions of half-crazed fellow creatures in precipitate flight.

"Surely God has been good to us up here!" he exclaimed, at sight of the trifling loss in his own home. And when he had looked down from his point of vantage upon the many bare, smouldering miles that had been devastated between sun-up and sun-down, he exclaimed again and gratefully, "Yes, God has been *very* good to *us*!"

The dark of evening had now fallen, but the reflection from the lurid skies furnished abundant illumination; ample substitute for an unobtainable, even if not forbidden light, in the house; and making his way without difficulty to the well filled cupboards, Robert essayed to eat. But the sight of food now sickened, and the famished man turned from it with loathing.

"It will come in good when Winnie gets back to-morrow," he soliloquized, as he locked and left the house; for while he no longer shrank from remaining in it, and the comfortable bed looked almost irresistibly tempting to his weary frame, both the mind and body of the really ailing man were now so wrought up, so in commotion, that to sleep were impossible.

Picking his way therefore down again through the deserted streets of the hill, Robert returned to the lower levels which skirted the raging holocaust. Back to where the fear-filled populace—nervous though strangely calm—peopled the glowing streets, or kept guard over their possessions in the near-by parks and city squares, which now seemed like vast department stores, so crammed were they with their varied assortment of household effects and personal belongings.

Mingling with the surging multitudes for further kindly service as occasion arose, the lone young man spent the night with them in the out-of-doors; now moving on to places of greater safety, at the command of the dynamiting crews, now apprehensively watching the steady encroachments of their implacable foe. Again, chained to the spot by a compelling fascination for the *awful grandeur* of the spectacle under the canopy of night, as the rapacious flames sprung with fiendish ferocity from building to building, tauntingly thrusting their angry, forked tongues

through the charring doorways and casements of story after story, to burst at last with triumphant hiss through the dismembered roofs and shoot defiantly upward, as though to scorch the very heavens themselves; already apparently in a blaze. While from time to time, their sympathetic interest would center in accounts which now began to filter in, of the amount of damage done by the great Earthquake, elsewhere.

It was not until almost dawn of the following morning, however, that news was received which caused Robert Manning to so conduct himself for a while, as to be considered by those near at hand a victim of the disaster who had suddenly lost his mind. With cheeks ablaze with fever, and in the throes of a consequent splitting headache, he had but just before dropped down upon one of the much trampled grass plots of a little park; for the long protesting limbs had at last refused to support him longer. Seated near, two men eagerly scanned a copy of an evening paper, just received in a roundabout way from one of the trans-bay cities; when suddenly, one of the twain exclaimed with horror, "Oh! here's the very worst yet! A hundred and fifty of the inmates killed, many escaped, and the buildings a total wreck! Poor Agnews!"

"Agnews, man!" shrieked Robert Manning, wildly; springing from the ground at mention of the name. "What about Agnews? Give me that paper!" And

snatching the sheet from the hands of his astonished neighbor, he read the shocking news.

“AGNEWS INSANE ASYLUM TOTALLY
WRECKED.

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY PATIENTS, TWO DOCTORS, AND
MANY ATTENDANTS KILLED, AND HUNDREDS IN-
JURED—DANGEROUS MANIACS HANDCUFFED
AND CHAINED TO TREES IN THE GROUNDS
—A SCORE HAVE ESCAPED—BALANCE
OF THE TWELVE HUNDRED IN-
MATES GATHERED IN PENS
AND STRONGLY GUARDED.

*Marvelous heroism and noble conduct of those in
charge!”*

As thou it had stung him, did the crazed man drop the unoffending Herald from his hands, and forgetting thanks or an apology to its owner for his rudeness, or to pick up the derby laid aside to cool his burning brow, bolted from the spot as though pursued by all the Furies of an Inferno, and made for the nearest livery.

But no conveyance was to be had here, for many of the horses had been killed and coaches smashed,

*The above announcement is quoted verbatim from sheet of that date still in possession of the author, who later verified the statement by inquiry of the Asylum management.

by the collapse of most of the walls during the morning's temblor. Nor did any better success attend his applications elsewhere, for where stocks had not been destroyed, they had either been given or impressed for use by the authorities; neither was there an auto obtainable at any of the garages visited. So in despair, Robert at last set out on foot for the scene of the blood-curdling happenings some fifty miles away, of which he had read, and which concerned him so vitally.

Spurred on by the exigencies of the case and temporarily fortified with the unnatural strength of fever, he sped along at an incredible pace, walking when he must, riding when he could. And several acceptable even though short lifts, were given the hatless, gaunt looking man as he got out into the open country; his grimy appearance from the unusual labors of the day before, and the pitiful look of terror which shot from his eyes, stamping him a demented refugee, his condition called forth naught but kindness from all.

And to them all, as to himself when alone, he talked unceasingly, though seldom coherently; for he could not allow himself quiet in which to think of the horrifying circumstances which must await him at his Mecca. Death, manacles and chains, escape, bodily injury,—whatever it might be, the responsibility for it, the *sin of* it, lay at *his door*; and he dared not dwell upon the frenzying thought, made a thousand-fold more maddening by remembrance of the undamaged home, in which had been found perfect safety.

When the distance had been about half covered, continued efforts along the road to secure some means of transportation were rewarded with success; and by doubling the hire asked, that last installment was made in such good time, that five hours from the beginning, found the distracted man at the end of his harrowing journey.

When he leaped from the still quivering buggy, and rushing into the improvised office of the wrecked institution, pallid as marble, his whole frame visibly trembling like an Aspen, and in a hoarse whisper of inquiry attempted to ask for news of his stricken mother, he could not so much as articulate her name.

But he was known to the attendants, and for answer to his look of agonized query, he was led to a tent close by and shown that mother, unhurt in body, and *mercifully clothed anew with the priceless garment of her own right mind*, skillfully assisting the nurses to care for the injured.

A *moral* shock had deprived of reason in an instant; a *material* one had restored it as suddenly and completely. And when Robert's incredulous eyes had seen what *great* things the Lord had done, overcome with emotion he faltered, brokenly, "Surely—God has—been good to—me! Yes, God—has been—*very*—good—to"—

But the devout acknowledgment was never concluded; for outraged Nature at last asserting herself, her transgressor dropped unconscious to the floor.

That evening, a closed carriage was seen leaving the grounds of the Agnews Asylum for the Insane, occupied by the same three: a mother, a son, and a devoted servant, who but two days before, in a similar carriage, had made a repugnant and gloomy trip from the county of San Francisco, down into the county of Santa Clara. But the horses drawing *this* carriage were headed in the opposite direction; and the journey, though a sorrowful and anxious one, could not be repugnant or gloomy, for *now* it was being made by a *sane* mother, taking to his *own* home a son, who, though stricken in *body*, was yet blessedly, of *sound mind*.

CHAPTER XIII.

REFUGEES—A VICTIM—A CONFESSION.

"So the little family * * * was obliged to join the vast army of refugees * * * and become pensioners of the world's **unstinted bounty.**"

"'Both iv 'er legs is bruk,—savin' yer pris-ince—and sumthin' inside, too, the dochter thinks.'"

"'I literally **tortured** my sweet, young charge into compliance with my wish.'"

When Robert Manning *walked* out of the burning city, twenty-four hours after its rough-housing by Nature, nearly one-third of its area was a desolate waste; an untraversable wilderness of smouldering ruins. Nothing but cellars filled with mountains of *debris*, from which yet issued flame and smoke, and frowning walls, told where its houses of business had once stood. Of its houses of worship, education, news, healing, mercy, mirth, or public accommodation, still less marked the former sites of by far the greater number; while virtually *all* of its banks, factories and shops, and two-thirds of its humbler dwellings, besides its notorious 'Chinatown,' had been swept from off the city's map; these all having occupied the lower level grounds and modest heights, of its Southern and Southwestern extremities.

And still the progress of the great fire was un-

checked. A roaring, seething furnace of flame still forged steadily ahead, notwithstanding the dogged persistence of the brave fire-laddies, and the assisting volunteers who so nobly recruited their thinned ranks; all of whom, grimy and haggard, with fainting stomach, parched throat and tongue, and blistering hand, still clung like leeches to their assigned posts of duty, furiously wielding their inadequate weapons of attack.

Yet that it could continue its advance until it had swept up the central eminences, and still further glutted itself upon the more pretentious homes of this strictly residential quarter, not omitting even the mansions of many of the very wealthy which sat in such crowning splendor upon the pinnacles of its highest hills, was deemed impossible. And this presumption of the absolute safety of *this* neighborhood—the one in which he himself lived—had come as a comforting thought to the toiling son more than once through the varying situations of the trying day; for when the absent mother should one day return to her home as he would have her,—and tried to hope it might be,—to find everything as it had been of old would surely enhance the pleasure of that home-coming. “And perchance,” thought he, “we might even decide to stay, now, and profit by growing up with the *greater* city, already being talked of and planned for.”

But when the young man was *driven* back into it

less than a day later, the costly palaces, with their invaluable treasures and works of Art, had fed the flames, too; the burnt area had been doubled; while still, blocks ahead, could be heard the continuous boom, boom, of the wrecking crews, telling of the appalling amount of preventive demolition of what men call, worth while, yet going on. And even had he been conscious, he could not have located the exact site of his own home; for nothing but ashes and cinders now covered the spot.

So the unfortunate little family, homeless, and for the time, destitute, with the man upon whom it could have leant laid low by illness, was obliged to join the vast army of Refugees, and become tent-dwellers in one of the many now thickly populated city parks; places where, for months afterward, the one-time rich and the always poor, saint and sinner, learned and ignorant, the cultured and the uncouth, dwelt amicably together side by side, in the inclusive bonds of fraternal good fellowship.

Much of needless privation if not of actual distress, would surely have been the lot of the Mannings at this time, had they been alone; for though of necessity, for a spell, pensioners of the *world's unstinted bounty*,—and *grateful* ones, too— they would naturally have been of the number to shrink from making their wants known. But now, the capable, old servant of a lifetime, became literally the head of the house. For Robert—like Peter's wife's mother—lay sick of

a fever; and while the mistress watched and tended, she it was who kept the strange machinery of the new manner of existence, well oiled and running smoothly.

It was Winnie, who took her place in the long, tiresome bread-lines of daily sustenance; always with senses alert and tongue quick to speak up for a promising tid-bit for her beloved mistress. Winnie, who ran blocks with her can, to secure a share of the scanty milk supply for her sick young master. Winnie, who always managed somehow to learn whenever and wherever supplies of wearing apparel or household necessities, were to be given out, and managed also to be first in at the distribution, for the sake of her precious charges. Yes, and it was Winnie, who finally lifted them both out of the Slough of Despond,—so to speak—and brought peace and happiness to others long strangers to it, as well. For with the big heart and loquacious tongue of the race from whence she had sprung, the woman could not be other than sociable; and it was this very sociableness which did it all.

Now the forming of new acquaintanceships by many, at this time, without the formality of an introduction, was but a natural sequence from the meeting with the same people daily, in the long lines before the relief stations. For the tedium of the always slow advance must be lessened, and as best it could; ordinary human nature could not have stood the strain, otherwise. And by the law of natural selection, like

drawing to itself like, Winnie McCaffrey was not long in finding a congenial coterie of her own class; and her exceptionally gruesome experience of the disaster was always listened to with such flattering attention, that the poor soul gradually came to take even a certain pride in having it to relate.

Not that this woman, alone, or above all others, was given to dwelling upon the calamity. Far from it; for in those early post-earthquake and fire days, there was place for no other thought or subject, in the minds and upon the tongues of its victims of all classes, than the sensations and incidents of those three *terrible* days and *worse* nights. And not only was the fabric of good manners frequently strained to the tearing point—and beyond—by the overpowering temptation to break in upon the harrowing recital of another, with an account of 'how me and mine felt and did,' but the spirit of Ananias seemed also somewhat abroad in the land, it must be admitted. Yet who could not forgive a breach of etiquette, or even an occasional careless handling of the truth, by a people who had been subjected to so long and fierce a mental and nervous strain. It was well, perhaps, that they should talk, anyway; for:

'The grief that does not speak,
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.'

In this way, four weeks of community life had

passed, and with them had passed the crisis in Robert Manning's sickness, also; for the consuming fever had burned itself out, and the period of convalescence having set in with none but favorable symptoms, great joy and thanksgiving pervaded the little household.

One morning about this time, Winnie McCaffrey appeared in the presence of her mistress, bringing a very moving tale about an injured woman, then lying in a hopeless condition in a humble home a little farther out.

"I seen the gur'l many times befure in the line, an' it's a likely lukin' lass she is, too";—was the way the soft-hearted creature prefaced her story—"but niver got ter shpake wid 'er ontill this blessed mornin'. They're sthoppin' wid an' owld woman as kapes a little shop out on G—— Street;—the gur'ls aunt—an' shure it's there she was afther carryin' 'er misthres in 'er own arrums that mornin', wanst they got 'er out, an's ben a takin' care iv 'er iver sence; God bless 'er! The side o' the house fell in onto 'er in bed," she paused to explain, hurriedly, "an' both iv 'er legs is bruk,—saving yer prisince—an' sumthin' inside, too, the doctor thinks, for it's cupfuls o' blud she's ben a spittin' up iver sence. She only cum from Shecargu a few months back—wurse luck!—an' wuz kapin' a shwell boordin' house down town, loike she did afore she cum here. Mary Lanigan's ben a wurkin' fer 'er back there these four years gone, an' luvs 'er most as much, it looks loike, as *I* do yer own purty

self, me darlint. The poor craythur can't live much longer the docther's afeerd, an' I'm a thinkin' she must git orful lonesome fer sum-un ter talk ter. Av coorse, there's Mary an' the owld woman, but none iv 'er own kind, I mane. May-be yer'd loike ter be goin' ter cheer 'er up a bit yerself this afternoon, me darlint. Yer kin thrust Masther Robert wid me, now."

"Why certainly, Winnie, I'd be very glad to go if I thought I could be of any comfort to the poor woman"; replied the attentive listener; her lively sympathy all astir at the sad tale of suffering and loneliness. "It seems a very delicate thing though to thrust one's self upon a perfect stranger unasked"; she continued, hesitatingly. "It might be an unwelcome intrusion. I hardly know how I should feel myself under such circumstances."

"Now don't you be afeerd about the introosion part iv it, me darlint. I *know* she'll be glad ter see yer, fer wasn't the gur'l herself afther tellin' me that she knew 'er misthress was jist a pinin' fer sum'un ter talk ter?" persisted the servant.

"Well, what's the lady's name, Winnie?"

"Shure the gur'l niver wanst mintioned it, an' I niver thought ter ask, me darlint"; confessed the other, rather sheepishly. "But 'er own name's Mary Lani-gan, annyway," she continued, brightening, an' it's a little shop, an' the number's 2000, an' yer can't miss it, nohow"; she explained, volubly.

Surely there is 'a Divinity that shapes our ends.'

Margaret Manning was not now being led by pure accident, as it would appear, to the bedside of the very woman of all others, who for six long years she had been wishing most anxiously to meet. For this seriously injured victim of the dreadful Earthquake, was none other than our old acquaintance, Mrs. George Benedict Nichols, formerly of Chicago. Aunt of Alice Nichols and the late Gerald Harding; whose *untruthful, dastardly letter*, announcing the marriage of her nephew with the *fiancée* of Robert Manning—which the reader will now call to mind—had robbed the trusting heart of the youth of his faith in womankind, and in so doing, had hardened it, and paved the way for the long train of evil consequences that ensued. Yet nothing could have wrung from her the question by which she sought to vindicate her never-wavering faith in the dearly loved daughter of her deceased friend, when opportunity thus, at last, unexpectedly offered. For out of her kindness of heart, Mrs. Manning had acted upon the thoughtful suggestion of her maid, without delay; and when ushered into the presence of the unknown sufferer,—with an apology and explanation ready to offer for her intrusion—her astonishment to find here the old-time friend was perhaps the greater of the two, although the surprise was a shock to both women; almost too great for the sick one.

The consideration which sealed the lips of the one, however, was equalled by the tact and magnanimity

of the other; who, when her nerves had grown somewhat steadier again, as she listened to her caller's tender out-pouring of sympathy and anxious wish to be of assistance in some way, soon inquired after the son. "He is married by this time, I suppose?" she ventured.

"No, I am so fortunate as to have Robert all to myself yet," answered the mother, "and I hardly think he will ever marry"; she added, cheerfully; with a generous pretense as though naturally well pleased at the prospect. Upon hearing which, Mrs. Nichols, enfeebled though she was, launched at once into the subject of his jilting; confessing her sole responsibility for it, and frankly stating the reason.

Vividly and at length did she rehearse the long, heart-rending struggle of the distracted girl between *love* and *duty*; in no wise sparing herself, as she told of the exacted promise of an immediate and full explanation to Robert, through a letter to the mother, and of her intended and diabolical breaking of that satisfying promise. Of their intercepted letters to Alice she next confessed, and then referred, with shame, to the final writing of her own abominable misleading one.

"Yes, Mrs. Manning," concluded the repentant woman, visibly shuddering at the remembrance, "I literally *tortured* my sweet young charge into compliance with my wish, and then, after cruelly robbing her of the sweetest and most precious experience life

could ever give, marriage with the life-long lover in whom her fresh young heart was in turn, inseparably bound up, I crowned my selfish work by infamously casting suspicion upon her truthfulness and loyalty; and I have not known a single happy hour since. As I have looked back from time to time upon the distressing occurrence, it has seemed *impossible* that it could have been reality; that it must all have been a shocking dream. For loving Alice to the extent I *did*, how I could ever have brought myself to the performance of such a cruel act, I have never since been able to determine. But oh, life is such a complex combination of possibles," she continued,—as though lamely seeking even now, to justify her 'cruel act'—"and what will a woman not do or dare for the sake of the man whom she deeply loves? Could we but love with the heart and head at one and the same moment," she finished, musingly, "how much misery the world would be spared."

The enlightened visitor now considerably arose to take her leave; for although the call had been a short one, its shock and agitating nature had made it full long for the sick woman, who nevertheless, in her exhaustion, yet voiced the deep joy of heart their Providential meeting had brought. "For the end is not far distant," she sighed, "and I shall die a relieved and far happier woman now that I have been permitted to set my dear girl right in your eyes. If I could but see *her* once more, and hear her sweet voice

say, 'I forgive you, Aunt Alice,' I think I could leave the world contented."

"I have never been able to bring myself to doubt Alice, Mrs. Nichols," now offered the other, consolingly, "for I knew her beautiful nature too well; and I have always felt that we should hear a justifiable reason for her extraordinary action, some day. Robert's faith, though, was unfortunately, so shaken, that her name has not passed between us for years; so I am naturally more than thankful for our unexpected meeting, and to you for your magnanimity and unselfish confidence. Which could not have come at a more opportune time, either," she went on, "for Robert is but just now recovering from a severe attack of typhoid; and this assurance of Alice's fidelity and love, will be the most effective tonic we could give him." And leaving her afflicted friend, with the promise of daily visits thereafter, the lighthearted mother sped rejoicing to the bedside of her waiting son.

"Could you stand a *very* happy surprise, dear?" she asked with eagerness; a more than usually happy smile illuminating her loving face, as she took the maid's place beside him.

"Sure, mother, and glad to have it"; replied the convalescing one; his hollow eyes lighting up with pleased expectancy, as he laid an emaciated hand in that of his parent. "It wouldn't be *you* to bring me any other kind."

"Well then, I shall have to tell you in the beginning

who the injured stranger upon whom I have been calling proved to be"; commenced the mother. "That of itself will surprise you as much as it did me, I fancy."

But at the first mention of the long tabooed name of "*Nichols*," Robert Manning's face instantly darkened; the old, hard look at once crept back into his eyes, supplanting the pleased expectancy by which they had been momentarily lighted, and a silencing hand began to go up in immediate protest. But with an appealing, "Hear me to the end, dear," the mother pressed it gently back upon the coverlet, and continued her recital, until she had repeated, in full, the story of the cruelty and perfidy of the aunt, and the touching fidelity of the sacrificed niece.

Gradually had the hard look died out of the eyes of the sick man as the unusual tale grew, while the antagonistic expression upon his face was succeeded, in turn, by those of astonishment, incredulity, indignation, yearning, and at last, by the most withering self reproach; but not until the pitiful story was finished did he attempt to speak. Then—with not unmanly tears dimming his eyes and a voice far from steady—he broke out remorsefully, "And her heart was mine *all* the time, and yet I *doubted* her? Oh, my *dear*, *sweet Alice*!" he moaned; now covering his convulsed face with shaking hands, "that I *could* doubt you, proves me to have been *unworthy* of you; and yet, the agonizing rack upon which my tortured heart has been bound all these bitter years, has been, that even though *doubting*, I could not *cease* to love you!"

Margaret Manning had delicately withdrawn from the presence of her son, leaving him alone, for a little, with his overpowering emotions. As she came back to him he questioned eagerly, "Where *is* she mother? I must have her forgiveness for the great wrong I have been doing her."

"That I did not learn, Son, although I longed to ask; for the short interview was of course very—even dangerously—agitating to Mrs. Nichols, I feared, and in fact, I made several, though unsuccessful attempts to end it, even before I had heard as much as I did; and yet the tardy confession seemed so relieving, that I could but let her go on. However, I have promised to sit with her a part of each day hereafter, and if she seems to me able tomorrow, I will try to find that out. She is a very sick woman though, Robert, and it breaks my heart that *we* have not a home to offer her. I am very glad, however, that she seems to be in good and loving hands."

Now to learn that Robert Manning was yet a single man, had proven the most acceptable news, and inspiring, that could have been brought to remorseful Mrs. Nichols; for reparation might now be made for the great wrong that she had done him. All through the weary, wakeful hours of the night following her encounter with the mother, this thought had imparted strength to bear her great physical sufferings; and when her caller returned on the morrow,—bringing some sick-room dainties the warm-hearted Winnie

had managed to prepare—happily smiling, despite her pain and weakness, her first words of greeting were “They may have each other yet, Mrs. Manning!”

There was of course, no need to inquire who ‘they’ referred to; and in quick surprise the other eagerly asked, “How so, Mrs. Nichols? Why what do you mean?” And was told that Alice was free again. “My nephew was accidentally killed last year”; explained the woman.

“You are *quite sure* of this?” exclaimed the mother. “Oh, then tell me where she may be found, that I may bring her to my unhappy boy!” she implored, altogether forgetting a proper expression of condolence to the bereaved aunt, in her selfish joy at the prospect of such unlooked for happiness for her own son.

“Just where Alice is at this time is a little hard to say, for since her marriage I have seen but little of her; the earlier years having been lived abroad, and later, she has been in the East, where I have never visited her. For although the dear girl urged me to accept a home with her after my husband’s death, I could not bring myself to do so, but have been providing for myself; so have found but little time for going about. Her last letter, however, stated that she was going to Paris to live, and would take her leave of America the middle of April; and I should no doubt have had mail with a European address before now, if it had not been for our calamity here. But it is liable to come any day, you know.”

"Paris will be none too large a place for Robert to find her in, even without an address; returned the mother confidently; "and with such a quest in store, it will not be long either, before he is able to start upon it. I don't know how to thank you as I would, Mrs. Nichols," she went on to say,—gratefully pressing the feeble hand that she had been holding as they talked—"for the joy and comfort your new ground for hope will be to us. If I could only do something to relieve your sufferings, I should be so happy. Are you quite satisfied with your physician? And has he ever called any one else in consultation?" she finished, solicitously.

"Yes, I am perfectly satisfied Mrs. Manning, for Doctor Woods is an able man, as you know, and I feel sure is doing all that could be done for me. I have finally consented to his bringing a friend to consult with him tomorrow, however; an eminent physician from the East, somewhere, who was taking a little rest in the South, it seems, and came up from Los Angeles with the first trainload of doctors and nurses. Dr. Woods is very anxious to have his opinion of my case, but I feel sure that it will be useless"; she added, hopelessly. "I thank you for your interest though, and your visits have done me a world of good. I shall see you again tomorrow, I hope?"

Now it had been by no means an easy matter for Robert Manning to possess his soul in patience, during this somewhat longer absence of his mother at her second call upon their unfortunate friend; so when she

at length returned and entered the tent in which he lay, the hollow eyes with which he searched her expressive face for the information craved, were as living interrogation points, while he exclaimed, tremulously, "I know it's good news you bring me, mother, and I can't hear it a bit too quick!"

"Yes, good news indeed; *very* good news; so good, in fact, that I'm almost afraid to tell it to you in your weak state. Will you promise not to get excited, dear?" And in the eager face—eager yet hesitating—bent down to kiss him, the impatient young man saw mirrored an earnest of the great, glad tidings she would fain divulge.

"No *good* news about *her* can *harmfully* excite me, mother; you know that. Where is she?" he urged, feverishly.

"In Paris, Robert, and—a widow!" was the startling news the overjoyed woman could no longer refrain from telling.

"What, mother? Alice both *alive*, and *free*!" cried Robert in amazement; his face turning to an ashy whiteness as he spoke. And although trembling violently from the shock of suddenly aroused hope, he yet declared uncertainly, "I can't believe it mother! Such news is far too good to be true!"

"There, there; calm yourself my dear boy!" cautioned the other; alarmed for the effect of the agitation her impulsive words had caused. And as she laid her hand quietly upon the forehead of her

deeply moved son, she continued, "You must not throw yourself back now, you know, but get well as quickly as possible. For happily, the good news *is* true, and I want my dear girl brought to me without any avoidable delay."

"You won't have to wait long for her if it rests with *me*, mother, and I shall prepare her by an immediate letter. Please bring the materials; I feel strong enough to write"; he affirmed, confidently, and attempting to raise himself up as he spoke.

"Oh, no, son, I couldn't allow that, even if we knew where to reach her!" spoke up the mother, quickly; pressing her over-ambitious convalescent back upon his pillows. "Which we do not, as yet," she went on. "But Mrs. Nichols is expecting her European address daily, so try to wait patiently, dear; then when it *does* arrive you *may* be *strong* enough to use it at once."

"Well, I suppose I shall *have* to restrain myself, mother," sighed Robert, dejectedly; "but it will be terribly hard work; for although now about as *poor* as Job, you know I am not naturally so *patient*."

CHAPTER XIV.

MINISTERING ANGELS—A BELATED BETROTHAL.

“‘As usual he was in with the first load.’”

“Mrs. Harding came out at the first news of the disaster, to look for **you** and help in the work of nursing.”

“‘Aren’t you **very** glad to see me, Margaret?’”

After night’s gloom, the bright and sunny morrow.
So Joy treads ever on the heels of Sorrow.

A great writer—but feeble critic of his Creator—once belittled his God-given intellect enough to thoughtlessly ask, why health had not been made catching instead of disease. So, deep down in the querulous human heart, all too often, lies imbedded the erroneous belief that the only experiences of life which do not come singly, are its troubles. But were we to take correct note, should we not find that the Heaven-sent *joys* of life are legion, constant, and abiding? While its troubles,—not disasters, so called—though always man-made, are few by contrast, occasional, and fleeting? Of its surprises likewise; are not the unpleasant far outnumbered by the pleasant, daily? And of these latter, a copious and refreshing shower, was now about to descend upon the heads of several of the familiar personages of our story.

Said Robert Manning gaily to his parent on the following day, as she took leave of him for her accustomed ministrations in the other sick room, "If you bring me as good news today as you did yesterday, mother, I shall be sitting up a little by tomorrow."

"Well, I certainly trust I may have some for you then, dear"; returned the happy mother, kissing him tenderly. "And even *better* than I have yet brought you. I ought to, hadn't I? For this will be the third edition, and there's luck in odd numbers, you know"; she laughingly reminded. Then added, "Dr. Woods, whom I met and had quite a talk with yesterday, hasn't yet quite given Mrs. Nichols up to die, he says. He's to have a consultating friend with him today, and I really have strong hopes, from the way he talked, of bringing you a more encouraging report of *her* case, at least."

"I hope you may, I'm sure, poor woman," returned the young man feelingly; and there seemed a very sincere ring to his friendly words. "Don't forget to give her my regards and good wishes. And don't stay *too* long, please!" he called, as his mother stepped briskly from the tent. Then when a cheery "I won't, dear," floated back to him, Robert Manning's face sobered, as an involuntary tremor of upbraiding recollection swept his heart. And closing his eyes he murmured tensely, "How can I ever thank God enough that she has been brought out of it all *so wonderfully!*"

And "*wonderfully*," was in no degree too strong a word to describe the almost miraculous restoration of Margaret Manning. The *dreadful affliction* with which she had so recently been visited, had left no *visible* trace upon the woman, and well *might* the one-time wayward son, the offending cause, be thankful. Thankful, too, that the years of disappointment, mental torture and heart strain to which she had first been subjected, had left so light a mark; for few there are who could have weathered such storms as had crossed *her* path, without showing many detracting physical scars. But accepting them—as she had done—as a needed, while yet uncomprehended discipline, meeting them in a spirit of loving forbearance, bearing them with a sweet submission and a patient courage which would not let the hope of bright days yet to come, *quite* die within her, since the dense, black clouds had rolled away, she might be said to have emerged from the fiery furnace with little more than the smell of smoke upon her garments. And now, arrived at the meridian of life, when the more subdued splendors of its early Autumn were beginning to mellow the flaming brightness of its spent Summer-time, Margaret Manning was quite as beautiful to look at as the flattering Springtime of her life had promised. Moreover, sorrow and suffering had accomplished their intended ministries, in still further deepening the warm and tender light that had always loved to hide in the depths of her dark blue eyes, while the enforced community

life of the period, with its inevitable broadening of vision and sympathies, had seemed to somewhat tone down the ingrained queenliness of manner, which to some, had savoured of haughtiness; thus conspiring to make her beside beautiful, a more than ever charming woman as well.

And that she was so considered, was evident from the admiring remarks of Dr. Woods to his consulting brother, as he slowed down his car that day at the upper end of the block in which stood 'the little shop' kept by the 'owld woman,'—of which Winnie McCaffrey had told—and saw the attractive stranger, whom he had first met but the day before, rapidly approaching from its lower end.

"Why *here* comes the beautiful widow of whom I've been telling you, Hal!" he exclaimed; the sober, pre-occupied face relaxing into a cheery smile as he spoke. "Such a charming creature ought never to have kept heart whole and fancy free for nearly thirteen years, as my patient tells me *she's* done;—they're long-lost friends, it seems. She should have made some poor wretch miserably happy, *long* ago. Here's *your* chance, Pard; I'll introduce you, if you'll promise to convince her that thirteen's an unlucky number. Why what are you turning so pale for?" he continued banteringly. "Who'd ever have believed that such a confirmed bach as *you* was still susceptible!"

"You'll be spared the trouble of introducing *us*, Doc;" returned his companion, blithely; "for *we're*

still longer 'lost friends,' I guess. I haven't seen the lady for almost thirty years, but I'd have known her anywhere." And springing from the still grating machine, the man swung hurriedly around behind it to the sidewalk, and with one stride, placed himself directly in the path of the arriving woman; his face fairly *agleam* with delight. For had he not already learned of her long period of widowhood? So not the *hope* alone, but the *determination* to possess his love at last, had sprung to instant life in the constant heart of this splendid, noble looking man.

"Margaret!" he gasped in astonishment, as he raised his hat;—dispensing with the unnecessary "Mrs." in their case—"Do I *really* see you once more, or is it that my delighted eyes are merely playing me a scurvy trick?"

But although the wealth of silken hair—whose fiery redness in youth had been such a continual source of chagrin to its owner—was now like a crown of spun silver upon that owner's head, there was no need of introduction; for instantly extending her hand, the long-lost sweetheart returned his salutation with an equal show of delighted astonishment; though "*Harry!*" was all that *she* could say.

"Well! Well! Good afternoon, Mrs. Manning," put in Dr. Woods who, hat in hand, now joined the surprised couple. "This seems a very delightful reunion, surely; I must say I feel intensely pleased with myself for having brought it about!" He laughed ap-

appropriately, rubbing his palms together at the same time in a self-gratulatory manner.

"It is a *most* delightful re-union, Doctor," replied the smiling woman; "for Doctor Gardiner and I were playmates in childhood; and you know though lost to sight, such companionships are often very dear to memory. But *however* do you happen to be away out here?" she asked in astonishment; now turning again to her friend. "Though that's certainly an absurd question to ask, on second thought," she added again addressing her remark to Dr. Woods. "Rather ought I to have *expected* to learn of Dr. Gardiner's being here at such a time as this, for in calamity's hour, anywhere, his name has always appeared in print as among the ministering angels; as *you* know even better than *me*, probably."

"That's the truth, if ever it was spoken, Mrs. Manning," assented the physician, heartily; "and as usual, he was in with the first load."

"Better get in to your patient, Doc.," put in Harold Gardiner quickly, to stop further embarrassing conversation along the same lines. Adding, as they moved together towards the shop door, "What was it William the Great said about our indiscretions serving us better than our deep laid plots? Now it was but the merest accident my being with that first rush; for Florida was my original plan for a little holiday this year, and if I hadn't happened to change it at the last moment,—and for no specially good reason, either—

why I shouldn't have had the honor and notoriety. So you see there's no credit due me for it, at all."

Whereat his old college chum exclaimed, with good natured irony, "Oh, *Modesty!* thy name was from the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, *Harold Lincoln Gardiner*; M.D.S.D.F.R.C.P.&S. et cetera."

Now great as had been the surprise and pleasure of this most undreamed of meeting with her one-time 'playmate,' still greater of both were in store for Margaret Manning, on that eventful day of pleasant surprises. She was already in the sick-room greeting her injured friend, when the physicians,—tarrying to remove their hats and converse a moment in the hall outside—entered; and with a cheery "You remember Dr. Gardiner, do you not, Mrs. Nichols?" had moved off a little, that the physician friend might take her place; saying as she went, "I know you'll be pleased to meet our old Colorado friend again, Doctor."

Whereupon, the friend addressed, with mingled surprise, relief and satisfaction speaking from every feature, advanced quickly to the side of the sufferer; and while taking her hand, answered with excessive cordiality, "*Very* much pleased, Mrs. Manning, for her own sake, and still more so for the sake of another." And then, to his *confrere*, "May I tell your patient some good news, Doctor?"

"The quicker the better; returned the mystified Dr. Woods, with a nod of unqualified approval, as he seated himself expectantly upon the opposite side of

the sick bed. "For 'good news is like water to a thirsty soul,' you know."

"My dear Mrs. Nichols," said the now smiling Dr. Gardiner, "this is certainly a most gratifying moment to me. Why I have been trying to locate you these two weeks past, for your Niece, Mrs. Harding, of New York; who is in the city, and greatly distressed because unable to learn anything as to your fate or whereabouts."

"What! *Alice here!*" fell simultaneously from the lips of both women; Mrs. Manning springing excitedly to her feet, while the sick woman, with tears of joy stealing from beneath the trembling eyelids emotion had forced her to lower, murmured gratefully; 'Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face.' At which the learn-ed M. D.'s looked inquiringly at each other.

"Yes," resumed the speaker, "Mrs. Harding came out at the first news of the disaster, to look for *you*, and help in the work of nursing;—she having taken somewhat of a course in the profession—and having been unexpectedly delayed a week in sailing for Europe. She is serving at one of the hospitals, where we met; and telling me of the missing aunt for whom she was searching, begged me to keep up an inquiring for her as I went about. Talking the matter over brought to light the fact that you and I were oldtime acquaintances, which, of course, increased my interest at once"; he put in courteously. "But I had no idea

when my friend here asked me to consult with him over your case, that I should find in his patient the very lady for whom I have been so persistently seeking. Mrs. Harding will be a very happy woman when I carry her the good news.

"And *I* am much more so, Doctor," returned the patient, feelingly. "Happy to know that she is here and I may soon see her, as well as to know of her loving anxiety about me; although that is nothing surprising in Alice, is it?" she asked of her friend.

"*Indeed* it is not; such a picture of her is but true to life"; replied the other, warmly. "But where may we find her, Doctor?" she now asked, with much nervous eagerness. "Her presence here is of even greater importance to me than to Mrs. Nichols. I must see her *at once!* Kindly tell me how to go to her!"

"Mrs. Harding is on duty this afternoon," was the discouraging reply, "and I hardly believe you would wish to interrupt her in her work. She will be free this evening, however, and could I not bring her to *you?*" And at this gallant offer,—a very significant one to him—Dr. Woods gave vent to a mental 'O, ho!' To repeat it, with even greater force and pleasure, at the ready acceptance, for which he hopefully listened.

"If you only *would*, Doctor, I should be so grateful", said Margaret; "for my son, Robert, is ill and unable to go for her, and we *must* see her at once";—instantly popping in the hospitable after-thought—"and by that means, you and Robert will meet the more

quickly, too; as I am of course very anxious that you should do. What time, about, may we expect you?"

"O, not until he has brought her to *me*, please, Mrs. Manning," interposed the sick one, persuasively. "You will let me have her *first* for a little, I am sure!"

"Certainly, my dear friend; that will of course be *her* wish, too; but you know how impatiently *we* shall be awaiting her, so you will be very considerate, I know. We are Refugees," she now turned to inform her gallant friend. "You'll find us in —— Square, north side. I don't know how to designate the *exact* location to you,"—she hesitated—"except that we are in between the Waldorf-Astoria and Poverty-Flat tents." Explaining, with a smile, "we have very facetious neighbors, you see; so much more so than ourselves, in fact, that their ingenious door-plates—which by the way, spread over the whole side of their tents—must be your only guide, I'm afraid. And now if there is nothing that I can do for Mrs. Nichols," she finished, bending over the other to inquire, "I must get back to Robert."

"Allow *us* the *pleasure*, Mrs. Manning; "Dr. Woods begged instantly. "We shall be going soon. If you will be so good as to leave the room now, Dr. Gardiner and I will get down to our professional duties at once, and will detain you but a short time." Breaking in upon the "Thanks, but"—which was beginning a polite refusal—with "You'll reach home fully as soon as by walking, and have an opportunity for a chat with your '*childhood's playmate*' beside."

So while she waited, Mrs. Manning repaired to the little shop in front, to talk with Mary Lanigan about the more encouraging symptoms noticeable in her loved mistress that day, and which had naturally conduced to the unusually comfortable night the girl declared her to have passed.

"Well?" she queried, with friendly concern, as the doctors joined her a quarter of an hour later.

"Your friend's condition is *exceedingly* favorable now, Mrs. Manning," answered the physician in charge. "The change for the better for which I have been hoping, has set in within the last twenty-four hours, and I feel that I may say now with great confidence, that she will recover."

"Thank the Lord!" burst out the loving servant. And while a new prescription was being written and further instructions given the girl as to the future care of her recovering patient, Mrs. Manning stepped back into the sick room, to leave with her now hopeful friend a word of congratulation and good cheer.

As the three left the little shop and again came out upon the sidewalk, Dr. Woods—with a nice show of politeness—handed his fair guest to a seat in his waiting car; and then, after expressing the hope of meeting her soon again, smilingly bowed himself off, pleading another call to make close by, to which he would prefer walking. So with a grateful, "All right, Doc.; see you later"; Harold Gardiner sprang nimbly to a seat beside his long-lost love.

"Oh, don't turn!" spoke up the woman quickly; as her companion began making a curve. "You're headed for—— Square, now; it's in *that* direction"—indicating the same with a nod of her head.

"I know, Margaret; but we're going for a little spin first," returned the man, coolly.

"Not this afternoon, I regret, Harry! I must get back to Robert!"

"Robert is in very good hands, I understand, during your absence"; affirmed the other, with the confidence of one well informed upon his subject. And then, with a soft wistfulness, "Aren't you *very* glad to see me, Margaret?"

"*Delighted, of course*, Harry; but—"

"Then prove it to me, by allowing me this first blessed half hour with you alone"; interrupted the man.

"But I must prepare Robert for this evening! It's—"

"There's several hours between now and evening, Margaret"; he again broke in; while all the while increasing the distance between mother and son.

"But he must be prepared for it gradually, Harry," the former now protested;—a trifle impatiently, too, it might almost be said. "He's very weak; and a sudden shock would not do! you don't understand the situation, either! Alice and he were *most cruelly* separated six years ago, by—"

"And you and I were separated by a cruel fate, thirty years ago, sweetheart, and I don't mean that

we ever shall be again," the man interrupted, for the third time, and he spoke with great determination. "Though just say that you'll"—he adled, and was now in turn interrupted with the fond mother's pleading: "But think of *Robert*, Harry! and do *please* turn round!"

"It's just because I *am* thinking of Robert, that I'm not taking time to tell you over again of the depth and fervor of my love, Margaret, which the years have certainly proven"; returned the lover, tenderly. "And I'll promise to turn round, the very minute you whisper that precious little word in my ear, for which I pleaded thirty long years ago."

"*Do* take me home, Harry," again coaxed the woman, after a moment's dwelling upon this reminder of her lover's constancy. And then, poutingly, "You don't seem to have any heart, now-a-days."

"I've never pretended to have one, love,"—came the laughing response, with most exasperating gaiety—"since I gave it to *you*, in the long ago. I haven't needed any. A gizzard has answered my purpose very well indeed."

"But this is *so sudden!*" next complained the eternal feminine. "And you've grown so arbitrary, too, Harry; why you used to be nice and manageable."

But the soft impeachment in no wise disturbed the serenity of the accused lover; who saw in it but a sign of approaching surrender. So he answered unmoved, "And found it didn't pay, dearest; years make us wise."

"Oh, Harry, I *beg* of you, turn round! we're getting so far away, and Robert will be so nervous and impatient!"

"Whenever I hear that sweet little word, Margaret," rejoined the wooer; as determinedly as ever, and perceptibly increasing his speed as he spoke.

"Oh, Harry!" This in despair.

"You wouldn't humiliate me in Dr. Wood's eyes, would you, sweetheart?" now offered the man, craftily.

"Dr. Woods! Why *he* doesn't—"

"Oh, yes he does, dearest; knows just what purpose I borrowed his car for, and has already congratulated me with the most *flattering heartiness*, too."

"*You borrowed his car!* Then this was all premeditated? You *audacious* man!"

"'He who would attain an end, must take the means there-to' Margaret; and—'wisdom with years,' you know."

"Harry, *do* turn round"; she once more coaxed.

"I'll not only turn round, sweetheart, but *speed* for ——— Square, the very instant you command me."

"Oh, dear!" The woman fidgeted uneasily for a moment; and then, settling back with a resigned air, "Well, I simply *must* get there, Harry; so—*speed*."

L'envoi

SWEET ALICE.

"When sweet Alice was soon after brought to him there was but little to be said, even had not emotion prevented."

'A merry heart goes all the day;
Your sad, tires in a mile-a.'

So, although there was much less time than the apprehensive mother could have wished, in which to prepare her feeble convalescent for the avalanche of overpowering *joy* about to sweep down upon him, it proved amply long for safety; and the love affair of the younger couple—like that of their elders—having matured, and its sweet story been told, in the long before, when sweet Alice, radiantly happy with anticipation of the longed-for love in which her heart might at last, find its well earned rest, was soon after brought to him, there was but little to be said, even had emotion not prevented. It was more a *looking* of *unutterable* things by *adoring* eyes, into eyes which *joyed* to *toss* them back again with a *caressing smile*. But the following day, the waiting friends in far-away Paris, were startled by the receipt of a disappointing cable, over the familiar initials, A. G. H., which read:—
'Sudden change of plans—Explanatory letter *en route*
—Future home, Denver; with Dear Mamma Manning and—*Rob*.'

THE END.



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